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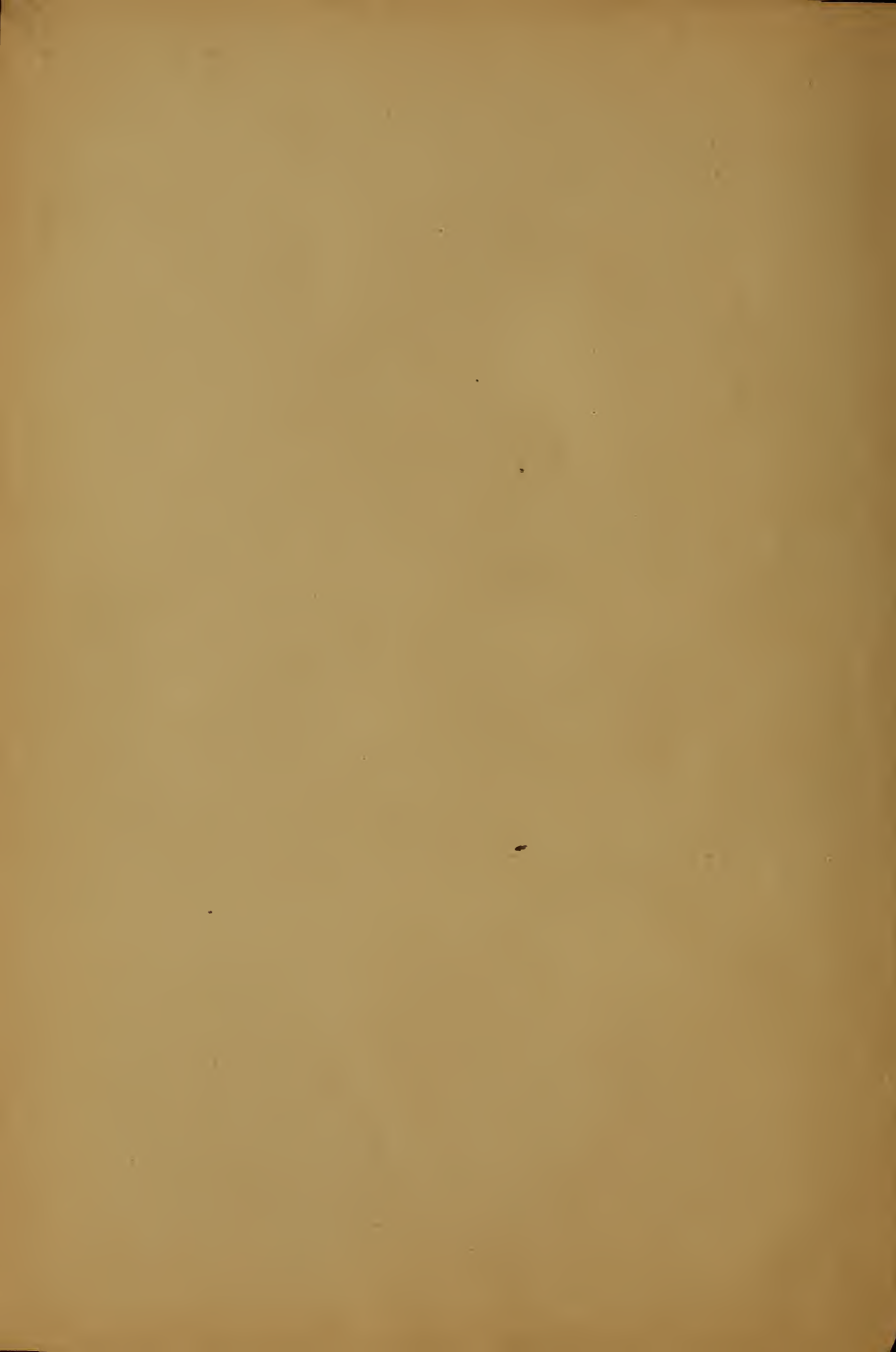
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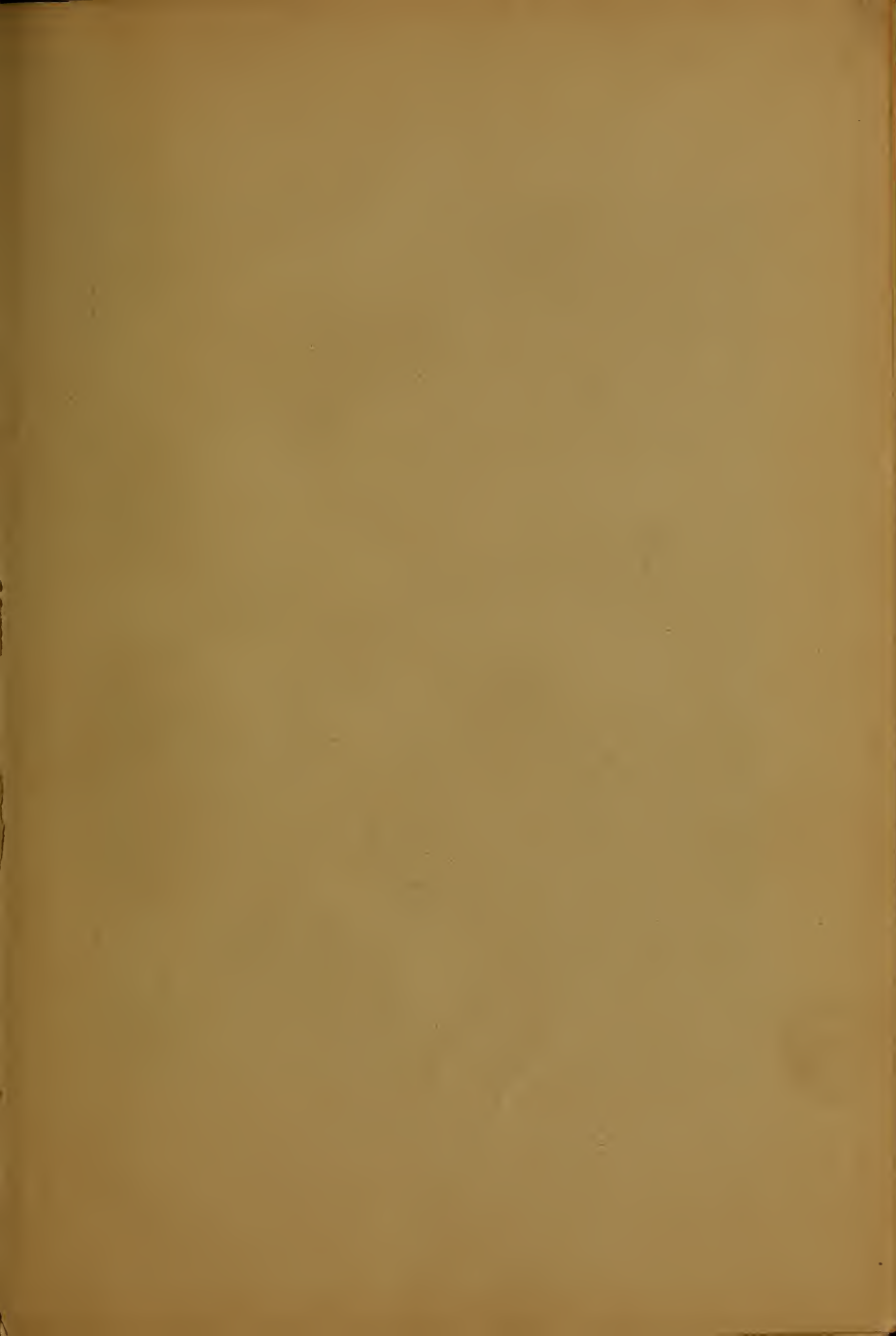
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St. Odile praising God.

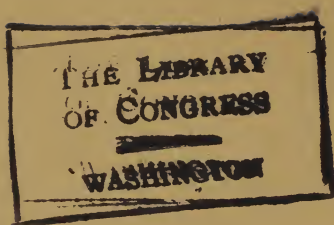
THE
STORY
OF
SAINT ODILE,
THE
PEARL OF ALSACE.

BY
REV. FRANCIS X. MCGOWAN, O. S. A.

In portum religionis cunctis semper fidissimum.
(S. Vinc. Lerin.)

JOHN J. McVEY,
PHILADELPHIA, PA.
1899.

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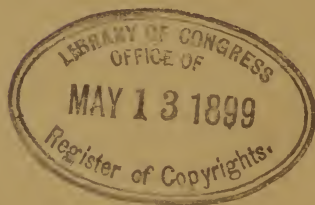


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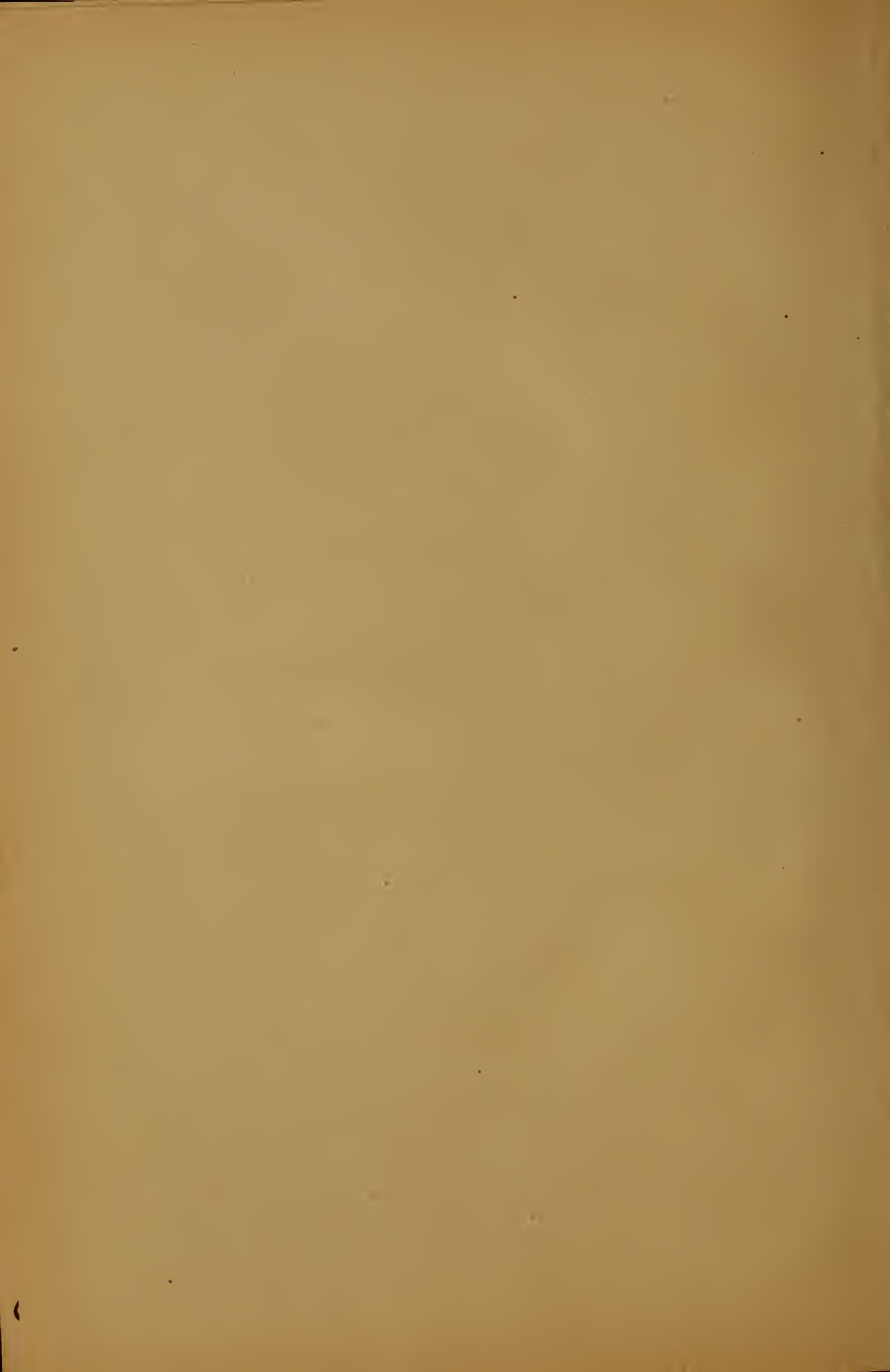
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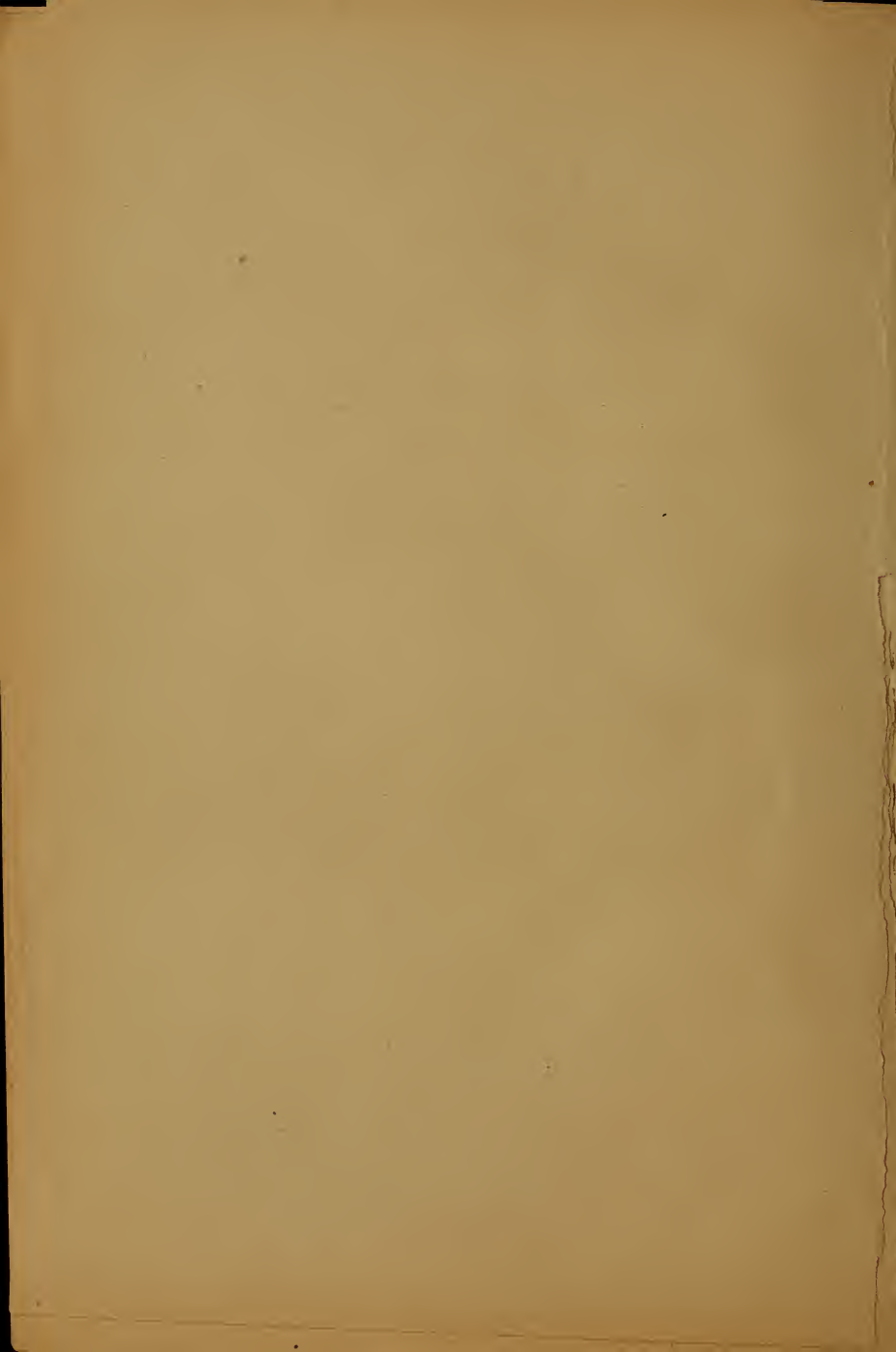
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TO THE
Religieuses
OF
OUR YOUNG COUNTRY
IN MEMORY OF
THEIR MANY HAPPY YEARS
OF LOVE AND LABOR
IN THE SERVICE OF THE DIVINE MASTER,
THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.



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PREFACE.

THE history of the early Saints has always a strange fascination for Catholic readers. There is so much fact in the folk-lore from which their lives have been evolved that it generally bears on its face the stamp of credibility. The legends concerning the deeds and virtues of the saints of the remote past have historical certainty as a basis, and the imagination of the simple-minded people has not detracted from this truth, but rather enveloped it with a poetic charm, which is appreciated by all historical students.

The facts, related in this history, but clothed in narrative garb, have been given as traditionally certain by many French and German writers. The legend has varied somewhat, although the events in the main are quite similar. One version relates the sad death of Hugh, Odile's brother, which was inflicted by his father's hand, for having

dared to bring the exiled sister back to her legitimate home. It is quoted from Jacck and other authors in Digby's *Mores Catholici* (Vol. IV, ch. V.)

We have followed a less tragic account, which appears to be more probable.

A chapter on the abbeys and nuns of the Middle Ages has been added to the story, which will well help to remove the false impressions given by ignorant, malicious or prejudiced writers on this theme of mediæval days. We are confident that its perusal will be attended with both pleasure and profit.

The French spelling of the Saint's name is retained: *Odile*, though it is often written *Odilia* and *Othilia*. The same may be said of the name of the castle which became Odile's abbey: *Hohenburg*, sometimes written *Hoemborch*. The cheerful hope is entertained that this little book may serve to give the reader some insight not only into the heroic life of Alsace's Patroness, but also into the mediæval period with its wonderful movements.

HOOSICK FALLS, N. Y.

THE STORY OF ST. ODILE.

“THE PEARL OF ALSACE.”

CHAPTER I.

ODILE'S BIRTH AND HER FATHER'S ANGER.

ON the highest point of “the blue Alsatian mountains,” there stood away back in the VIIth century the stately castle of Hohenburg, a strongly-fortified place, whose history is wrapped up in the various religious and political events of those early days. At the time of which we write, the lord of the domain was Adalric, whose possessions were even more extensive than those of his fathers. One evening he sat pondering deeply some unusual occurrence that had forced him into retirement, and apparently, as he leaned upon the table of the window, he was looking at the sky which was begemmed with myriad

shining stars. It was not a strange thing to see any one gazing, as it were, in ecstasy on the splendid landscape which unfolded before the windows of the old donjon. The castle of Hohenburg, as haughty as the Dukes of Alsace who built it, guarded with jealous independence the loftiest summit that could be descried for miles around in the neighboring country. The sinuous mountain-sides were covered with large sombre fir-trees, a species of tree found in the Vosges chain, as well as in the immense German forest, to which it has given, on account of its color, the name of the *Black Forest*. When night has spread its shadows over the wearied earth, the moon's mysterious rays play strangely among the foliage of the trees and lend to them fantastic shapes. Assuredly, after enjoying the light and heat of the sun, we cannot help admiring the beauty and soft brilliance of the "lamp of Almighty God," for it gladdens the heart of the fatigued woodman who traverses these mountain-woods at a late hour, through which he could not otherwise

find his way, but would have to grope through gloom among huge rocks and dangerous steeps.

Down below in the valley, the flickering fires glow, like lights in a ship's rigging, as if placed there to guide the belated traveler. Around the hearth the members of the family have gathered after the day's toil, and the eldest one among them recounts some famous tale, graven long since on memory's tablets, with such exactitude that the story varies only in form and not in substance. Yet, incomprehensible thing! this oft-repeated folklore appears to have for each listener the charm of novelty. They wait thus, while the talk is progressing, for the parish-bell to ring out the curfew. The curfew-bell notified these good peasants that it was time for prayer, and they then gave thanks to God for the blessings of the day; just as at eventide, Adam in the terrestrial paradise held sweet converse with his Maker; so these pious Alsations in their isolated country elevated their souls to God and received in exchange for their fer-

vor and simplicity the peace promised unto all men of good-will.

They asked of God their daily bread, first the bread of the soul and after the bread of the body. They thus drew down the dews of heaven on their fine vineyards and the harvests of their productive soil; they knew but little else than their prayers and the directing of their ploughs, but there is no need of much science to understand the Apostle's words: *I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase.** Increase and benediction were in fact heaven's answer to this privileged land. The oïdium, phylloxera, and insects fatal to nature's products were not known in the VIIth century. During this epoch in the world's history, the two great secular classes, the Knights and the people, lived, as far as it was possible for human nature, strictly in accordance with the demands of religion, were esteemed therefore all as of high lineage and as sons of God, who at each recurring Eastertide and on chim-

* 1 Cor. iii. 6.

ing festival received the Lord's Body and the Blood of their Saviour coursed through their veins.

But let us resume our story. Sir Adalric sat in this tower musing at the stars. I doubt, however, if it were the stars that captivated his soul at this moment or if his eyes were strained to survey the lay of his estates far off in the distance. Such a temptation might indeed come to him naturally, for Providence had bestowed on him an inheritance exceedingly large; his lands rich and valuable stretched away to the borders of the Rhine, which could be reached only after many hours of rapid travel. The Rhine at that period rolled on "tranquil and proud of the progress of its waters," reflecting on its majestic bosom all the colors of the firmament and proclaiming in unison with nature the power and grandeur of God, "who changeth the heavens as we change a vesture."

The Lord Adalric could scarcely think of all these things. He appeared in fact to be in rather bad humor. One might take a

thousand chances and never guess what was the cause of his discontent. Had his troops received some check in war? Had his fine health received a shock? Was his honor compromised in some affair? None of these had occurred to raise his wrath. The Duke Adalric of Hohenburg had ascertained a few hours before that he was the father of a pretty little daughter, and that was the whole cause of his anger.

Adalric, as we have said, was a powerful lord, but it seems as if greatness does not always bring happiness, for had the Duke been only a poor serf, he would have welcomed a daughter as warmly as a son; but when a man counts among his ancestors Archambaud, the Mayor of the Palace under Clovis II., and Sigismund, King of Burgundy; when he has for a wife Bereswinde, the niece of Leger, Bishop of Autun, he has an ambition to have a son who will perpetuate his noble name and race. Adalric did not think that male-heirs might come later on, that a gentle little daughter was not to be despised;

he refused curtly to see the child that Bereswinde had brought into the world, and, though a professed Christian, he behaved as finely as a barbarian or a pagan. The new-born child was not even baptized. But that we may not paint Adalric in too dark colors, we must admit that in the early ages of the Church, parents often waited until their children had attained to the age of reason before the regenerating sacrament was administered, in order to give them the means of understanding the advantages of this holy rite and the serious obligations which it imposes.

To crown with bitterness the event of the child's birth, she was born blind. Ah! Bereswinde only loved the little one all the more on this account, because she had fallen from the heart of God into her bosom. Bereswinde possessed in a high degree the delicacy of mothers, who endeavor to make up by increase of love for what is deficient in the fruit of their womb.

"Dear husband," she said repeatedly to

Adalric, "consent to see our Odile. If you knew what grace is already in her smile, as she extends her little arms to me for a caress and her sightless eyes seem to speak, I am sure you would be delighted and love her as soon as you saw her." Adalric, however, replied always by knitting his eyebrows and scowling; Bereswinde did not dare say anything further. But a sorer trial awaited the duchess. God is accustomed, so some one has written, to make His elect souls pass through the crucible of sorrow, as we make iron pass through the fire to purify it.

The child grew up happily under her mother's care, having no suspicion that anybody, not certainly her father, bore animosity towards her. The poor afflicted one did not yet comprehend her pitiable condition, and hence had no feeling of disappointment on that score. Bereswinde brought her often into the gardens adjoining the castle, and she played and enjoyed herself with the traditional storks, which, finding on earth a soul as white as their wings, would descend to her

for a while, to remount again and soar like sheets of gold in the splendor of the noon-day's sun.

One fine day, Adalric sent word to his wife that he had some important intelligence to communicate to her, and if she wished to hear it, he would speak to her immediately. He came to Bereswinde's apartment with sombre look, and perceiving Odile playing in a corner, he gave orders that she be removed at once; his antipathy was so extreme that he did not want to lay eyes on the innocent child. After this, he sat down near Bereswinde and conversed briefly with her: "Noble woman, I know that I am about to make your heart bleed, and I ask pardon beforehand, but you are aware of the oath which I have sworn never to look on my daughter. In the meantime, she has grown up and roams at leisure in all parts and appurtenances of the castle. If I were to shut her up in some retired room where I would not see her, the child might die for want of space and air. The wisest thing to do, con-

sidering the circumstances, is to separate her from the household. Give her in charge to some one of your attendants who will rear her as you wish, but let her be removed to some other place as early as possible." Bereswinde became pale at once, besought her lord to reflect on his plan, but obtained nothing favorable from him. The Duke seemed to possess a heart that was plated with steel, and that was better endowed with strength than tenderness. He who never faltered in any point of honor or loyalty, and who was recognized as brave as a lion, was singularly deficient in paternal sentiment, at least for the nonce, for we shall see in the sequel that God did not permit him to keep such a harsh soul.

The Duchess of Alsace, unable to change her husband's determination, sought at least to alleviate, as much as possible, the lot of the child who was to be taken from her. She selected a pious and affectionate woman who had been attached to her service for a long time. "Berthilda," she said to her, "I intrust to you a soul which is as dear to me as

my own. God is my witness that after Him I love nothing more than my daughter; but He who gave the Virgin Mary strength to stand at the footside of the cross, when her only Son was dying, will give me also fortitude to bear my sufferings. Berthilda, this is now the hour to glorify God by our patience." Berthilda wept, and for a long time her tears mingled with those of the afflicted mother. She then took her precious charge and wrapped it carefully in her cloak. The child slept smiling with the angels; Bereswinde impressed a last kiss on her lips, and mastering her grief, she left her servant woman to depart quickly with her light burden. As for herself, poor mother, she hastened to her oratory, and falling on her knees, allowed no other word to arise from her heart to her lips save that of holy Job, the great sufferer mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done: Blessed be the Name of the Lord." *

* Job i. 21.

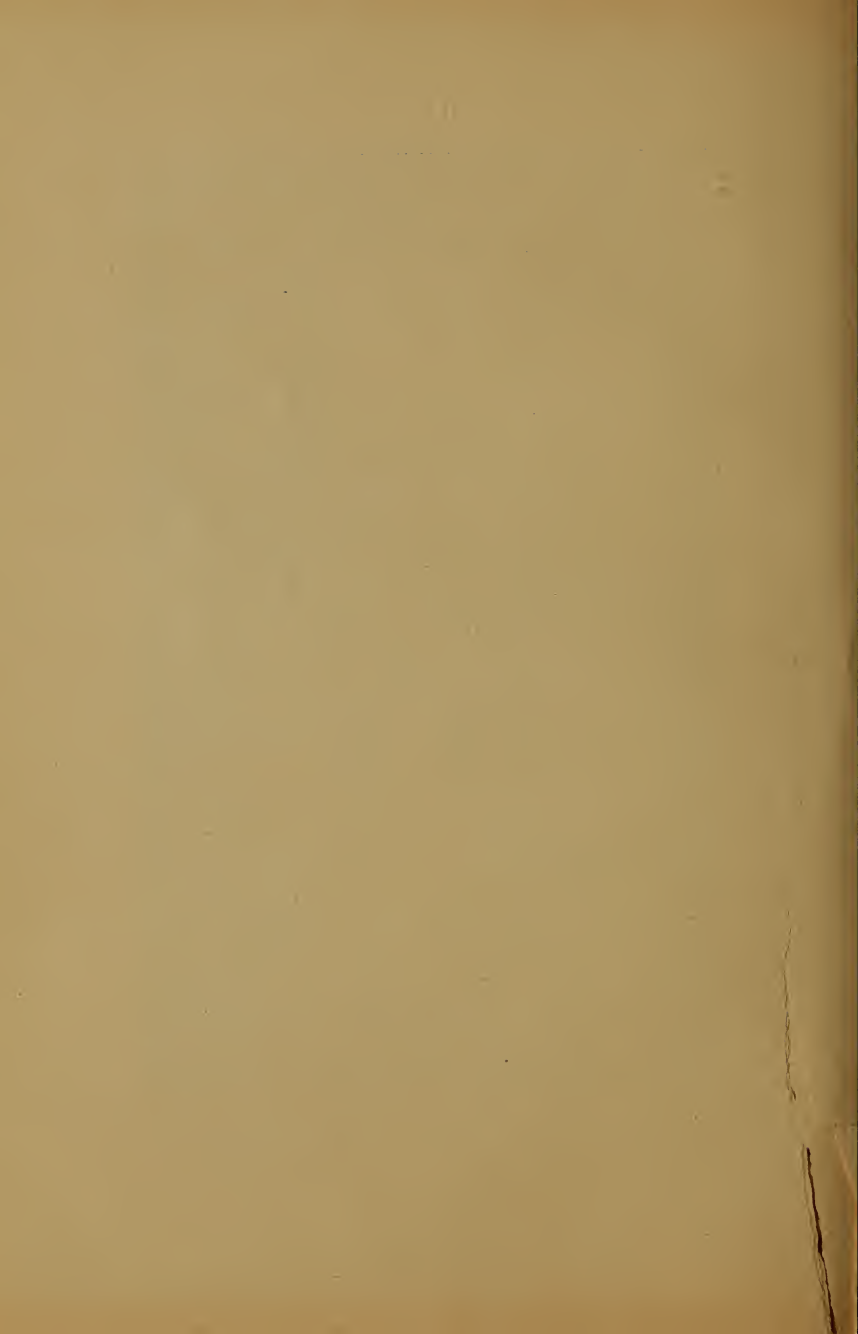
CHAPTER II.

ODILE'S CHILDHOOD.

LOOK at Berthilda descending the Hohenburg, accompanied not alone by the child, but also by a happy escort of angels, who have the pleasurable honor of protecting the daughter of the House of Alsace on her road to exile and bearing company to their future little sister. They followed the moss-covered paths, winging their flight under the branches of the aged fir-trees, and at length they reached the base of the mountain. There two horses, harnessed and saddled, pawed the earth with impatience, waiting for the signal to depart. In those primitive days women traveled on horseback, and scarcely ever made use of carriages. Berthilda, holding Odile with the utmost care in her arms, mounted one of the saddled beasts, and a young peasant jumped on the other. During the progress of the journey they chatted



“Look at Berthilda descending the Hohenburg, accompanied not alone by the child, but also by a happy escort of angels.”



pleasantly, having many things to say to each other; for the boy was Berthilda's youngest brother and she had not seen him for a number of years, but he was now returning to his aged father, whose roof was to shelter the daughter of his master. His name was Peter, and he had been informed by a messenger from the Duchess to meet Berthilda just at that spot.

"Ah!" said Peter, smiling at his ease, "what good fortune for the house! Is not this little princess our providence? Surely Duke Adalric will not only not allow her to want for anything, but he will also acknowledge generously the hospitality which we give his daughter. Now, sister, tell me how it is that the heiress of the Dukes of Alsace is thus handed over to the care of poor vassals? She is, nevertheless, as lovely as an angel of the good God, this darling little creature! There is some mystery beneath it."

"Alas!" Berthilda answered sighing, "you are not ignorant, Peter, that my noble masters have for a long time asked of the Lord

a child that would continue their family to posterity. Years passed and Bereswinde did not know the joys of maternity. Adalric was as gloomy as the skies of Hohenburg, when the storm-clouds brood on its sides. God at length listened to their sighings; the Duchess became a mother, but the little Odile did not realize the dreams of Adalric, who, seeing himself frustrated in his hopes, conceived a profound dislike for her. He wanted never to lay eyes on his daughter, whose blindness was a bitter stroke to him; and now, to be rid of her presence in the castle, he banishes her forever from it."

Berthilda spoke for a long time, and was inexhaustible on the subject of Bereswinde's goodness of heart and the budding graces of Odile, whom she regarded almost with devotion, as if her faith gave her an intuition into God's designs relative to the child's future. The horses also neighed with unusual heartiness as they bounded over the plain; one would have said that they were conscious they carried, not like the ancient boatman

the fortunes of Cæsar, but the fate of Alsace and Heaven's sweetest benediction to this land so often blessed. I do not know if I were deceived, but it seems to me that, in the passage of the little caravan, the flowers even diffused a sweeter odor, the breeze was more delicately scented, and the sun more radiant. It was nature's hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord of all for this especial favor vouchsafed Alsace. The bird chanted it after its own manner, and the humble violet had its own note; but the warbling of the one could not equal the singing of Odile's heart, which ravished the heart of God as she murmured her childish prayer, nor the perfume of the other equal that which issued from the pure and sweet soul of the little exile.

After traveling leisurely, they arrived at the cottage. It was a decent little house, situated pleasantly beside a fresh flowing brook. The walls were covered with ivy, which always gave them a cheerful look, and the garden was famous in all that section of country for the beauty of its flowers; the

rose and lily grew there as in the Promised Land. Jesus, who was said by the Jews to be of Nazareth, *the city of flowers*, had prepared for the young Saint a place equally perfumed. Yet the Master did not fail also to lay thorns in the way of His servant, without which He could not share with her the life which He had appointed for her on earth. Odile's hostess, the good mother Katharine, loved her exceedingly, as also Berthilda and every one in the house. Indeed, for this poor little heart there were needed a tenderness still more profound, and that natural asylum which God vouchsafes children when He places them under the protecting ægis of parental love. Odile grew up, and soon understood that this pleasant home was only her borrowed abode. She was blind, and was unable to feel the presence, as formerly, of the lofty towers of Hohenburg and their white storks, but it appeared as if she had some recollection of them, although she was at that time very young. She loved to run, like a gazelle,

clasping the hand of an attendant, over the heath of the neighboring wood, and to mingle her voice with that of the linnet, yet she was often seen suspending her joyous songs and sitting pensively on some mossy rock. Her blindness prevented her from using the spinning-wheel, which, at that period was not despised by the greatest ladies, and from joining in the play of other children, but she willingly assisted Berthilda when the latter dispensed alms or help to the needy. She forgot herself in church, and sometimes night surprised her without her heeding it; mother Katharine had to go often and take her from God, and in the performance of this task the good dame grumbled somewhat through anxiety, but not exceedingly.

Bereswinde, being unable to go whither her heart called her, sent at least from time to time to inquire for her beloved daughter. The messenger always brought at the same time from the Duke and Duchess, besides exemption from service, a goodly sum of money to the family. One day the varlet found only

Odile at the cottage ; she recognized him by his voice, and blushed at once with sadness and pleasure. "What news?" she asked, bringing her hand to her heart which beat quickly. "The noble Duchess has brought into the world a son to whom has been given the name of Hugh." "Then," returned Odile, clapping her hands and leaping for joy, "my father ought to be quite satisfied, and will, no doubt, not retain his bitterness towards me." The messenger did not dare reply to this. He came and went every year.

Once he came with an order from the Duchess, informing Berthilda that she was to be separated from her young mistress and that she was to place Odile in the hands of the Abbess of Jaume, who was Bereswinde's own aunt. At the abbey, Odile would receive an education befitting her rank and would be prepared for holy baptism, which Sacrament she had not yet received. Bereswinde at the same time loaded Berthilda with her thanks and numerous presents.

There was exceeding regret among the

good peasant-folk, but they were compelled to obey. Odile felt as pained as they did, and she took refuge in the church as was her custom. One thought, meanwhile, consoled her. In the abbey she would obtain at last the privilege of baptism, which had not yet been conferred upon her, although she was nearly twelve years of age. She longed for the regenerating water as the thirsty stag pants for the living waters, but for many a long day she had been Christian at heart and in desire. Speedy preparations for departure were made, and Berthilda was to accompany the young girl. The aged Katharine filled their hamper with provisions, and particularly filled their minds with considerable advice for the journey. Odile threw herself into the old woman's arms, and she also wept when leaving her venerable foster-father and Peter, who was wont to play and romp with her. Then they started on their journey. It consumed several days of traveling to reach Jaume; many delays were made so that the little princess might not suffer from fatigue.

The latter endeavored to dispel the weariness of the way, and put many questions to her guide about the country which they traversed. "Dear child," said Berthilda to her, "hitherto you have seen by my eyes; who will now see for you?" "God will provide," the child answered with her amiable smile.

At last the abbey of Jaume was reached, and Odile's grandaunt, the virtuous Abbess Agnes, having been notified of her niece's arrival, hastened to meet her. "May God be blessed!" she exclaimed, covering Odile with caresses. "It seems to me," she added in a low voice to Berthilda, "that I could now chant my *Vñunc Dimittis* and that this house has received salvation from the Lord."

Odile was soon delighted with the monastery. The *religieuses* gathered around her, and recognizing her modesty and simplicity, which were united to an evenness and artlessness of manner, so indicative of the innocent child, they began to love her almost immediately. Her heart failed when she had to separate from the affectionate Berthilda.

“Ah! how good it will be,” she said, “for us to see each other in heaven; then we shall be sure that nevermore will we be separated, but I promise in this world not to forget you.” And as she could not give this faithful friend a part of her soul, she cut off a lock of her hair, beautiful blonde tresses, and bestowed it on her second mother as a pledge of her great affection.

The Abbess was eager to testify her solicitude, and she cared for this child as for a delicate plant that needed a heavenly atmosphere in which to grow and flourish, and we can easily perceive the design of a merciful Providence in transplanting it to “the enclosed garden” of the monastery. But it was the sacred water of Baptism which this chosen flower now desired so much, and as the flower pines and withers on account of drought, so Odile’s health was in jeopardy on account of the thirst of her soul. Her aunt understood all this, and promised the young girl that in a few days she would become entirely and absolutely God’s child.

From that time Odile was cheerful and happy. She regained her color in all its freshness; her communicative conversation won for her all the nuns, and she became the object of their tenderest care, wishes and prayers. Everybody said that the air of Jaume was salutary for the Duke of Alsace's daughter, but the gentle child whispered to herself that it was the exceeding happiness of her soul which gave life and strength to her feeble limbs. She computed the time that separated her from the blessed moment of her Baptism,—that supreme moment that was to be followed by another so keenly desired, the moment when she would be united for the first time to her Lord and her God. She was now so often at the foot of the altar that she might be said to have taken up her abode there. The sparrow and dove build their nests in the cavities of rocks; Odile made hers in the shadow of the tabernacle.

It took considerable time to realize Odile's ardent desire, but the history of this tardy Baptism is deeply engraved in the memory

of Alsace. The different legends which have taken possession of it, and have been enriched by popular imagination, may vary as to details and form; but the day on which Odile opened the eyes of her soul, and, by God's miraculous intervention, also the eyes of her body, is a memorable day enshrined in the hearts of the people, and written in golden letters in the history of the country. Paris is by a just title proud of St. Genevieve, and Lorraine of Jeanne d' Arc; Alsace likewise claims her beloved Odile as her greatest glory, and delights to repeat incessantly that never on earth lived so sweet a princess, nor in heaven so gracious a Saint.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIRACLE AT ODILE'S BAPTISM.

A SINGULAR incident happened when Odile was baptized. The saintly priest Ehrard, who lived a very secluded life, was admonished by a mysterious voice to proceed immediately to the monastery of Jaume and administer the Sacrament of regeneration to the grand-niece of Abbess Agnes. But God's magnificent kindness did not cease here, as we shall see in the course of this chapter.

When the solemn day arrived on which Odile was to be made heiress to the eternal kingdom of heaven, great preparations were apparent in and around the abbey to celebrate worthily the festive event. It was but just that joy and gladness should be in the air, for another precious soul was about to be born for heaven. The convent bells pealed forth their happy hymn, and appeared

to endeavor to make the solemnities of Easter and Pentecost jealous of this new feast. The Abbess herself took charge of the neophyte, and proceeded at the proper time to the young girl's room to conduct her to the chapel where Ehrard waited for her. She found her niece prostrate before the crucifix. "Come, my dear," Agnes said to her, "come to the church, where you may finish your prayers. Give me your arm and I shall guide you along the way." Odile, who was entirely recollected in God, permitted herself to be led without saying a word. When I say that she suffered herself to be led, I am mistaken; for she walked so quickly that it required some extraordinary effort for her aunt to keep pace with her, and this extreme eagerness, as manifested in her walk, was a prophetic intuition to Agnes of the astounding miracle which was to be wrought in a few moments.

"Anybody would say," the Abbess thought, "that this child saw clearly her way, so quick and sure is her step to-day; but alas! her

large open eyes are dull as usual." Yet while Odile continued her prayers, the good nun in a low voice besought the Archangel Raphael, who of old cured the blindness of Tobias, to apply his remedies this day for the cure of Adalric's afflicted daughter. When the young girl, pure as a lily in her white gown, came to the place appointed for her, Ehrard arose, and standing before the altar, spoke to her at length about her happy privileges, and addressed her in such touching language that the whole assembly was in tears, while Odile appeared to be ravished in God and to be listening to the sweet conversation of some blessed spirit of Paradise who sees the Lord ever face to face. After the priest's instruction, he administered the holy rite of Baptism to this soul that had desired it so ardently and had comprehended its grace and effects so far as it is possible to do so here below. But, O marvellous mercy and condescension of God! at the instant when the Holy Ghost, who is, says Scripture, a consuming fire, that is to say both heat

and light, took possession of this little heart, so well prepared for His presence, He came with such overwhelming grace and strength that He illuminated also Odile's eyes, and as everything it seemed was to be divine in this stupendous marvel, the first object on which the natural sight of the new Christian centered was the Sacred Host exposed on the altar. I leave you to judge of the emotion of all who witnessed this wonderful spectacle, and to fancy how, during the Mass which followed the sacramental ceremony, souls melted in their emulation to offer worthy acts of thanksgiving. Odile, however, who was actuated in everything by the sense of faith, valued more highly than this temporal favor the happy privilege of becoming a child of God and the Church, and the immediate event which awaited her of uniting her feeble humanity for the first time with the precious Body and Blood of her gracious Redeemer. This was surely the day that the Lord had made for the little exile, and she had reason to be glad and to rejoice therein.

When the Holy Mysteries were finished and all had poured out their souls in benediction and gratitude to the Lord who had done such wondrous things, Odile accompanied her aunt to a large hall, where the poor and needy from the whole country around had gathered by invitation of the Mother-Abbess. On her way to this rendezvous she could not help giving utterance to joyful exclamations at the objects which appealed to her sight. She did not weary of looking at the *religieuses* one after another, who had been so kind to her. Then every thing was so new to her: the light of day, the appearances of persons and things, and all that to which we are accustomed and which we enjoy, but the privation of which is so keenly felt by poor blind creatures. Odile was surprised at every thing, asked pointed questions about everything, laughed and wept alternately; but above all, from the depths of her newly sanctified heart, she blessed and adored God. Her eyes actually gloated on the golden sunshine; the soil in

springtide did not drink in more avidly the sun's warming beams than she the first perception of daylight. She often paused to look at

"The sun, centre and sire of light
The keystone of the world-built arch of heaven."

After many stops, as we may well believe, along the way, they came at length to the place where the poor were assembled to receive alms in honor of the Baptism. Their sovereign's daughter wished to serve them with her own hands, and it was marvellous to see how graciously she distributed the help that would relieve their misery. She knew how to speak a sympathetic word to each one, giving from her soul as well as from her limited treasury. As regarded material alms, she was so generous that nothing would have remained for the last in line, if a wise provision has not kept something in reserve to satisfy such an exigency. It was certainly a stroke of good fortune, albeit a source of much happiness, for these wretched persons

bereft of resources, that the convent on this day doubled and trebled its usual bounty.

Many of us in our days know little or nothing concerning the monastic institutions of the Middle Ages. And whatever little knowledge we pretend to is vitiated by such elements of bigotry, misrepresentation and downright falsity that we may say that as far as knowledge of the internal workings of these monastic homes is regarded, we know nothing whatever about them. As potent an authority in our own times as Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister of England, has declared at a public meeting in London: "I wish we had still with us the friars of the good old days, who indeed *gathered alms, not for themselves, but for their fellow men.*"* Gladstone, a former Prime Minister, also averred that Oxford and Cambridge saw their golden days under monastic rule.† Writers have misrepresented those days of faith and benevolence, when little social misery was apparent and charity

* Father Karneagh, quoted in *St. Joseph's Blatt*.

† Ibidem.

was dispensed solely for God's sake, or from some laudable religious motive. If some poor serf of those distant days were to come to life, he would soon bring to right reason our great declaimers on social questions; he would inform these reformers of society that the monasteries were the hearths of charity, as well as the asylums of prayer and learning, and that the large possessions of these convents were the patrimony of the suffering members of Jesus Christ.

There may have been exceptions to this general portrayal of the monasteries of the Middle Ages, but they were rare, extremely rare (and such exceptions are to be found everywhere; there was a traitor even among the apostles); the monks of those times profited no more by their fortunes than do the Religious of to-day. These ancient monks labored like indefatigable working-men; they were the first to clear with their own hand a major part of the soil of Gaul and Germany, to lay the foundations of cities, towns and villages and to attract to their

neighborhood whole families—the nucleus of a nation—for whom they secured the means of gaining a livelihood. The monks also were occupied with the education of children, and for this purpose founded schools, free schools wherein there was no charge for tuition; they applied themselves with incredible patience and assiduity to preserve the monuments of antiquity, the priceless documents and innumerable manuscripts of previous ages, by transcribing them and transmitting them to posterity, that has repaid them with malice, contempt and falsehood. It was the monks who cultivated in France a moral beauty of soul by implanting in rugged hearts the faith of which that lovely country was so proud in days when she gloried in her title of “Eldest Daughter of the Church.” These convents of men and women, rich though they were in lands and stock, lived quite economically; food was frugal and not over-abundant in them, and their inmates were not disposed to gratify [fancies or indulge in extravagance. Undoubtedly, their domains were very exten-

sive, but they constituted only a trust for religious and benevolent purposes. Wealthy persons desired after their death that some portion of what they had received from God should be given to the Church, and in this they were actuated either by devotion or by the wish to do something in expiation of their sins. The abbeyes were able to carry into execution the wishes of testators with more readiness and less expense than official channels of charity in our much-belauded times are wont to do. History tells us that these monastic depositaries of charity were never deficient in their task, and they distributed with prudence and intelligence the gifts of the Lord. It is not, perhaps, in this light that they are represented in our days to the popular mind, but the truth abides eternally, and however maliciously they may have been painted, yet we cannot change the past. We shall speak more extendedly of the nuns in Chapter VII.

But see how far we have wandered from Odile in the consideration of these ancient

memories ; but no, we have scarcely left her, for we have been only tracing out what passed at Jaume as elsewhere. Surrounded by blessed influences, her soul developed as sweetly as the blooming rose, and she soon became a model of devotion and meekness.

“How happy she is! How angelic her presence!” Agnes said. “All will be well, provided no robber comes to take her away from us.” The robber, however, came. One evening a courier, worn out by miles of travel, but of proud bearing, indicative of the lackey of a rich and noble house, knocked at the monastery door. He was in a great hurry, he said, and was charged with an important message for Odile. The latter was engaged at the time in reciting the office in the choir with the nuns. She was sent for and received the stranger.

“Whence do you come, brave esquire, and what news do you bring?” she asked. “Is my dear mother Bereswinde in good health? as I daily beseech of God.”

“God has heard you, noble lady,” an-

swered the traveler. "But Bereswinde herself is ignorant of my message to you. I have been deputed by the young lord Hugh, your brother, to come to you; you have doubtless learned that four sons have been given by heaven to my master since your departure. Sir Hugh has not his equal on this side of the Rhine; you could not look at a finer horseman, notwithstanding his extreme youth, for he is scarcely fifteen years of age. Adalric finds in him all his chivalric tastes; but he possesses especially Bereswinde's virtues: her goodness, generosity and piety. Many times he has spoken to me of his dear sister Odile, when I pursued the game in our forests with him; at length, yesterday, not to be separated from you any longer, he said, 'Go, depart for Jaume; tell Odile that her mother cannot be comforted in her absence, and that Adalric, himself, whose joy was manifestly great when he ascertained that she recovered her sight, cannot now fail to love her. In a word, bring her to me.'"

Odile hid her head in her hands, and burst

into tears. Her regret at leaving her dear solitude; her joy in seeing for the first time her mother and meeting this brother who desired her with so much impatience; then her anxiety about the reception which would be accorded her at her father's castle—all these thoughts crossing one another caused a violent combat in her soul. She remained silent; she knelt in prayer; then calm came, and answering the man-at-arms, she said: "To-morrow I shall leave with you for Hohenburg."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUKE OF SUABIA, ODILE'S SUITOR.

THE sun arose full and bright the next morning, betokening a beautiful day. It sported merrily on the lofty bell tower, and quietly conveyed its morning smile to the window of the cells in which dwelt the daughters of the cloister. It presented itself with gladness at Odile's small window. Ever since this child of benediction had felt her eyes to be opened to the sense of light, she always greeted with extreme pleasure this first visit of the King of the luminaries, but to-day there was too much sadness in her soul for this. Her eyes roamed with restlessness and melancholy over the enchanting horizon which enthralled her young imagination, and drew from her heart accents full of poetry, and particular full of gratitude to the Lord of all; tears coursed silently down her cheeks, and she repeated a last prayer

for the mothers whom Providence had provided for her in this asylum of innocence and peace.

Her thoughts, after this morning devotion, turned towards Hohenburg. Gradually she lost her apprehensions, and not permitting her mind to be transported at the beck of the thoughtlessness habitual to her years, she undertook to look at everything in the ideal. Her heart bounded with joy at the prospect of embracing once more her mother; she even calculated that it would not be such a difficult task to gain her father's love; she wanted to make his vassals happy, and to open with her return an era of happiness in the seigneurial domains of Alsace; and finally she smiled, as was her custom, at the sunbeam that stole in her window to salute her. At this moment, the Abbess entered her niece's chamber. She understood at a glance everything, the internal contention of the girl, and the calm which her confidence in God had brought, mingled, perhaps, with some harmless illusions. At

the sight of her aunt, however, Odile could no longer restrain herself; she threw herself into the arms of Agnes and began to weep vehemently.

"Courage, my child!" the holy nun murmured into her ear. "Courage! the Lord Jesus to whom you have given yourself will always shield you. Fear nothing in leaving us. But tell me, if some one should sue for that love which binds you to the Spouse of virgins, what will you do?"

"Oh! I would not recall it from Christ. When we give our heart, dear aunt, we give it in good earnest."

"Certainly, but you may one day find yourself in situations particularly trying. Poor princesses are, alas! only too often the mere playthings of the ambition of others."

"God will keep me in His love," Odile simply replied.

The Abbess was silent; she had confidence in the future; what God guards is well guarded.

Meanwhile, voices on every side were call-

ing for the traveler. Her speedy courser was pawing the ground impatiently in the courtyard of the monastery; Odile must set off immediately, if she wished to reach Hohenburg before nightfall. - The noble daughter of Alsace now returns to the castle-home of her fathers, to become forever the tutelary angel of her native land. Towards the middle of the day, the journey was interrupted to partake of some repose and to allow Odile to recruit her strength in the shade of an old walnut; after this short respite the two travelers pursued their route, and like Eliezer of old conducting Rebecca to her master's dwelling, the herald-at-arms spoke to Odile at length of all that would henceforth enter into her life, and was inexhaustible in his information respecting the people of Hohenburg. Odile listened to him with pleasure, but as she was accustomed to converse with God for the purpose of finding a proper motive for her actions rather than seeking it in human views, she recollected herself at intervals and thus moderated her companion's

vivacity. In the quietude of her conscience she already tasted of the beatitude promised to the peacemakers, that they would be the children of God; in the sweetness of her charity she began to feel now that the earth, that is to say, the empire of hearts, was the lot of the meek; but it was reserved for her, as for the Apostle of the nations, to experience trial for the name of the Lord.

The first star had barely appeared in the sky when the two wearied horses finished the ascent of the majestic slope of Hohenburg. The faithful servant, turning by the court of honor, rapped discreetly thrice on a concealed door. This was the signal agreed upon; and Odile, unable to recognize where she was led, found herself in the arms of her brother. The saints have hearts like everybody else, yes, even more definitely, because they are nearer to divine charity; accordingly I leave you to fancy the exceeding joy of the young girl at meeting Prince Hugh, and I am sure at that moment Hugh would not have given his sister for ten provinces.

It was settled that Bereswinde should not be informed of her son's exploit till the following morning, and then they would all consult as to the best means of conveying their intelligence to Adalric. Odile went to her much-needed repose under the protection of our Blessed Lady, whom she devoutly invoked every night. The Virgin Mother smiled from heaven on her earthly child and bent lowly over her with tenderness, as formerly she hung over the crib of the Word made flesh, her first-born Son, the Principle of her two-fold maternity, for she is the mother both of God made man and of men ransomed by God.

When Odile awoke the next morning, she at first cast a glance around her new room. It was no longer the cell of the monastery, but a sumptuous apartment in the castle of the Dukes of Alsace. Do not think that she valued too highly this princely luxury; she was too good a Christian to estimate the wealth of this world more than it was worth in reality, and she labored for a better treas-

ure in heaven, which robbers can not steal away. She was in no wise to be blamed for this, for the only lasting thing we can ever find is what we have sent to the other world before us, and the Princess Odile acted in everything with heavenly wisdom and great love of God. After she arose and said her prayers, she drew aside the blue silk curtain which covered the window and looked out on lovely nature, so enchanting and splendid around castellated Hohenburg, but her thought did not follow her look. There was one fixed idea pre-occupying her: to see her mother.

At this moment, Bereswinde, who had been told all at an early hour by Hugh, opened the door of the room; she was followed by her four sons, three of whom were yet quite young. The meeting was followed by such happiness for Odile, that in its excessiveness it almost broke the chords of her heart. The dew-drop never so much rejoiced the thirsty flower, nor the song of the bird the weary traveler, as did the caresses of

the Duchess dilate her child's affectionate soul.

We can easily believe that the bond which was formed at that happy moment was even more strengthful than that which proceeds from nature; it resembled rather the tie that binds the Blessed above. When the excitement of this meeting passed away, the next matter for consideration was how the arrival of Odile could be communicated to Adalric, and all agreed that Bereswinde should be charged with the delivery of this message to her husband. She accordingly proceeded to notify her lord, and spoke to him so persuasively and pointedly that Adalric, who, on the other hand, had for some time compunction of conscience regarding his treatment of his daughter, assured his wife that he wished to testify towards his child his entire love and friendship. In order to prove the truth of his words, he gave orders that suitable festivities should be celebrated at Hohenburg for a period of seven days. During this week, there was nothing but hunting-parties,

banquets and tournaments. The hunting horn made the deer of the forest bound from their lurking-places ; the Rhenish wine flowed to the brim in large bowls ; and towards evening, the knights, laying aside their tight-fitting coats, put on their shining suits of armor to tilt courteously with each other in the presence of the ladies. Odile conducted herself with such grace and angelic modesty that the sympathy of all went out to her whenever she appeared. If she ravished the admiration of the angels, it could not be such a difficult task for her to charm poor mortals.

When the week's festivities were terminated, she resumed the tranquil life which she had formerly led under Berthilda's roof, and had continued in the abbey of Jaume. Every morning she left the castle, and following the beaten paths of the mountain, she visited the poor and afflicted of the surrounding country. Her presence was a sunbeam to every home, which dried away the tears of pain and sorrow. As she had now wealth at her disposal, she was able to relieve much

misery; but whatever she gave, she gave from the promptings of a compassionate heart and for Jesus' sake, and the poor of the country began to call her by the name which future generations have ever recognized: *The Good Princess*. As such Alsace knows her to-day.

Have you sometimes seen in the sky a cloud threatening to ascend from the horizon and obscure its brightness? Have you seen this dark spot suddenly increasing and impregnating the atmosphere with thick mist, until the sun, terrified, veils his face in the firmament? Have you ever felt the analogy between these phenomena of nature and what is going on in the life of a soul?

A cloud arose also in Odile's beautiful clear sky, and once more the hour of trial came. The Saint was compelled to face this cruel storm, and to add by patience—the virtue of perfect souls—to the vehemence of her love for God. But her heart was well

steeled to endure the effects of grief and trial, and she understood completely the truth of what has been expressed in our days by a woman of fine talent: "One who has not suffered knows nothing; one who has suffered somewhat knows something; one who has suffered much, and in a Christian manner, has the key to the secrets of eternity."

Among the guests invited to participate in the festivities of Hohenburg was a young German Duke, Frederic, one of the most illustrious princes of his time. Many lords were his vassals on both sides of the Rhine. Moreover, his martial bearing, lofty sentiments, and justness of mind and heart, made him an ideal ruler. He was much taken with Odile, and since he had seen her, he could not withdraw her image from his mind; truly the Prince had made a good choice, and he could not have chosen better. But our young Saint had also made her choice infinitely better, and would have no other spouse spoken of except the Lord Jesus.

Frederic returned to Alsace ; he imparted to Adalric the feelings of his heart, and the latter, dazzled by the prospect of this unexpected alliance, wished also to dispose of his daughter's hand to the ardent young ruler of Suabia. Odile, however, had already made her promise to her aunt, the Abbess, and still more to God ; she would not suffer her heart to be stolen away. Meanwhile appeals became urgent ; orders and threats succeeded to supplication and entreaty. At the height of the tempest the young virgin sought help from Him who, by one word, calmed the fury of the waves. " Lord," she said to Him, " Thou who dost command the elements and appease their wrath, Thou who art the Master of events and men, assist Thy servant. Deprived since childhood of all things, even of a mother's care, deprived almost of her milk, I have been ever fostered by Thy favor, and have hoped under the shadow of Thy wings. My father and mother had forsaken me, but Thou, Lord, didst shelter me ; Thy bosom was the refuge of the forlorn child,

who wandered from asylum to asylum, and now that they endeavor to make me break the promise which I made to Thee of consecrating my whole life to Thy service, and to perjure myself in Thy sinless presence, to Thy power, Lord, it belongeth to deliver Thy servant from danger and to protect my soul."

Odile arose from this prayer more peaceful and confident, having placed her virginity under the protection of Christ's power. But Adalric did not consider himself vanquished; he would make a last attempt to force the gentle girl's will.

He found her one evening sitting on a rustic bench; she was following with her eyes the glorious sunset away off in the horizon, and gazing at the heavens as if she were seeking there rest and peace for her mind.

"Odile," the lord of Hohenburg said, "I want you to know that this time I will be obeyed. I have promised you to Prince Frederic, and cannot go back on my word. You owe to your beauty and virtue this dis-

tinguished alliance, which will be honorable for us and will extol our house in the presence of all Germany. The Duke is now waiting for your consent, and will forthwith make the necessary preparations for the marriage."

"Father," Odile replied, "I have already spoken, nor can I retract the vow which I have made to Jesus Christ. What would you say of a vassal who violated his sworn faith with his lord? Would you not consider him a traitor and felon? May the King of heaven protect me against treason and felony!"

"The King of heaven knows that you are but a child without experience, and that you will be as free to serve Him in Frederic's palace as you would be in the cloister. To be brief, I do not accept your refusal, and command you to execute my orders with a good grace."

Lord Adalric appeared to be greatly incensed; he uttered these last words in a tone of voice which admitted of no reply, and



I have made a vow to the Lord, and I will accomplish it, even
if it were to cost me my life.

departed without hearing his daughter, who murmured softly: "I have made a vow to the Lord, and I will accomplish it, even if it were to cost me my life."

Odile, at length, understood that she could not remain at Hohenburg. In the meantime the German Duke announced his arrival; he had come, everybody said, to claim his betrothed. The castle put on a festive appearance, in marked contrast with the thoughts of the Princess in whose honor the majestic structure was clothed in unusual splendor. The eve of Frederic's coming was at hand. Adalric, proud in having, as he believed, overcome his daughter's resistance, looked with satisfaction at the magnificent decorations which were apparent on every side. The servants of the house came and went with busy air; Hugh seemed to be delighted; Bereswinde recommended Odile to God.

The mist of the night gradually enveloped the castle with its winding-sheet, and masters and servants took their rest, well earned after the day's labors. All at once a secret door,

leading out to a solitary path in the forest, opened noiselessly; a slender figure, resembling much an apparition, glided over the mossy ground; it was the daughter of the Duke of Alsace. Disguised in beggar's clothing, she was taking refuge for a second time in flight. For a moment she appeared to hesitate and leaned against the trunk of a tree as if her heart failed her; it was the remembrance of her beloved mother, her brother Hugh whose affection had brought her to the home from which she was now withdrawing of her own will,—it was these recollections that arose before her distracted mind and lessened her courage. What would she do? Return to the lordly dwelling and celebrate the earthly marriage-feast? or roam at random, sacrificing her repose in this world, to be found worthy to celebrate one day the heavenly nuptials with the virgins who ever follow the Lamb? She thought of the young martyrs of the first centuries, whose history she had often heard Berthilda relate,—of the Agneses, Agathas,

and Cecilians who sealed with their blood their union with Christ. A sweet smile passed over her countenance, and she exclaimed resolutely: "Onward!"

CHAPTER V.

ADALRIC'S GRIEF AND HIS QUEST FOR ODILE.

AT day-break, the hunting-horn sounded forth its vibrating notes, which were repeated again and again by the ringing mountain echoes, and announced Duke Frederic's arrival. All the people of Hohenburg were afoot, and so to speak, up in arms to receive the princely visitor. The long escort of Germans filed into the court of honor. Frederic, proudly seated on his best steed and arrayed in brilliant armor, recalled to one's mind, by his royal bearing, the god of war in person, if his countenance did not, on the contrary, reflect entirely pacific and cheerful dispositions. He spurred on his horse so vigorously before the main entrance and the animal wheeled about so gracefully that it was a marvel to behold him. Frederic supposed that the lady of his thoughts, hid-

den behind some tapestry, found the spectacle to her taste, but the poor prince lost his time and pains.

Meanwhile he alighted: Adalric and his son Hugh advanced to meet and receive him courteously. When he entered the spacious dining-hall, he was offered wherewith to recuperate his strength, but he hardly touched the viands which were served. Surely the Duke Frederic was not hungry this day! When a sufficient interval had elapsed, and it was supposed that Odile was now ready, according to the instructions given her the evening before by her father, a messenger was sent to her room to conduct her to her future husband. Her maid was charged with this mission; but the cage was empty, the bird had spread its pure, white wings and flown away. Adalric having been informed that his daughter could not be found, fell into a towering passion and despair. The castle halls echoed and re-echoed with Odile's name, but Odile was nowhere to answer the voices that called her.

You may easily imagine Frederic's astonishment and chagrin and Bereswinde's grief; yet this brave woman, a Christian mother above all, divined the reason of her daughter's flight and understood that she was acting by God's inspiration. Like the mothers of the martyrs, she offered silently her sacrifice to the Lord and blessed Him, even while her soul was wrung with anguish. Bereswinde was a noble character. This day which had been proclaimed as a festivity had now become a day of mourning. Seeing that all search was of no avail within the castle-walls, attendants began to explore the vicinity; information was lodged everywhere. Nobody could tell anything exact about Odile, and the Saint of Alsace seemed to have quitted the country after the manner of spirits, leaving no mark on the soil whereby she could be traced.

Adalric knew that he was suffering the chastisement of his fault, and that it was sheer folly for man to dispute with God His rights. He understood also that his daughter's brow,

which would be encircled with a royal diadem in eternity, could not stoop to accept a worldly crown, and that the flame of chaste love which lived triumphant in this virginal heart and which was enkindled by Christ's all-powerful grace, could not be extinguished by mortal means. The Knight's dormant faith awoke in the depths of his consciousness, and the day, without doubt, would dawn when he would appreciate that if he were honored by a desirable alliance with the most powerful prince in Germany, he would value as greater glory the union which bound Odile to the King of kings and the Lord of all.

He allowed some of these reflections, now too dilatory, to escape from his lips during the following week, when the family were gathered in a leafy bower, having with them for the last time their illustrious guest, who on the morrow was to depart to his large domain for which he had come to do homage to the daughter of the Duke of Alsace, and which she had nobly refused. Frederic, however had an upright and loyal soul, and

sentiments worthy a Christian prince. "Why did you not tell me," he said to Adalric, "that Odile was consecrated to God? Notwithstanding my great love for her, I would have been the first to say to her: 'Odile, you have made a vow to the Lord, you must fulfil it. I have nought to offer you but a passing glory, the riches of a few fleeting days; but He to whom you belong by a just title will have you reign with Him eternally in heaven. By St. Michael! to every lord his honor! I would never have yielded you to any prince of my time, for by a Knight's faith, I would have considered him a rash man who had the boldness to stand up as my rival, and with him I would have measured sharp weapons; but I give you up to God.' "

"Alas!" replied Hugh, sighing, "it is too late now, great Prince, for us to remedy our misfortune. I shall never be comforted for having lost Odile, perhaps, forever. Ever since my childhood's days, when I was but diffidently told that I had a sister, my heart went

out to her, it seemed, with the greatest affection which a brother could have, and I was always accompanied by preference in my childish rambles by those servants who had known her from birth and could speak about her. I had a lively solicitude for her at heart, and grew up in these sentiments until the day when the subterfuge of which you know came into my mind, and I sent my page as a safe escort to the poor exile to bring her back to Hohenburg. Ah! why must Odile be stolen again from me, and how foolish I was to urge my father to force her on a way that was not hers! Where is she now? What has become of her? Perhaps the daughter of the Alsatian Duke is begging her bread like the lowest of our serfs. Perhaps she is wandering in some savage forest and has found only a deserted cave for shelter. Perhaps—but I do not dare think of it—perhaps she has died far away from us, of hunger and want.”

When the young nobleman uttered these last words in a choking voice, he buried his

head in his hands to conceal his tears. At the same moment, a heavy step was heard in the path leading through the park, crushing in its passage the dry leaves which autumn had detached from the trees. It was the Abbot of a neighboring monastery, at the same time austere and meek, whose reputation for sanctity and learning was well known throughout the country.

"It is God who sent you, Father," said Adalric, directing his way towards the visitor to greet him. "Your words may alone bring me some peace. I have been very culpable in a two-fold manner towards my daughter. Do you think that the Lord will forgive me and send her back to me?" When he said this, he drew the Abbot into a secluded path where they found a seat made of stone and covered with a cushion of moss.

"God is infinitely merciful, my son," the monk replied, seating himself; "therefore I have confidence that He will take pity on your grief and not reject your repentance. I think that I can assure you in His name

Odile lives and you will see her again ; but consider how great has been your rashness ! First, when heaven deigned to give you this blessed child, the infirmity which she brought with her at birth made her a hateful object to you. The blind one, Adalric, was yourself, who was dreaming only of the riches and honors of the world for your family, while she who was deprived of the light of day was able to see spiritually in God's eternal truth. Now you are aware that she was a good, pious child in her exile, and instead of nursing rancor in her heart towards you, she, on the contrary, prayed incessantly for your welfare. Since her return to Hohenburg, you have seen as well as I how everybody in the castle and surrounding country has been delighted with her company, and how the child, it seemed, in her simplicity touched all who approached her with the magic wand of happiness. But see how ambition and smoke have made you fall headlong into sin against God and your daughter, when you strove to make these same views enter into

Odile's heart ; but that heart said to you peremptorily 'Halt,' and when you drew the storm upon it, it stole away from you to save its honor."

"You are quite right, Father," said the Duke, "and my guilt is now ever present to my mind, But tell me, was not this desire for which you blame me, this desire of an advantageous marriage for Odile, was it not after all a very legitimate desire?"

"Assuredly, if the circumstances were different. God does not only not forbid us from providing for the temporal welfare of our children, but he also commands us to do so. The very animals undergo this law, which is the most pleasant in nature. See, if my eyes do not deceive me, there is above me a pretty nest of wrens, from which I perceive the male and female going and to which returning on hurried wing to find whatever fortune may give them in the neighborhood and to bestow their daily pittance on their little ones. That which is instinct in these small creatures is elevated to the dignity of

a virtue in man who is endowed with reason, and it is a virtue whereby he accomplishes through duty what God commands him to do. This being determined, we must also admit that the soul is nobler and more valuable than the body. If the Father of souls, the Lord who created them, has some particular design or plan in regard to certain souls, and deigns to elevate them above the common lives and interests of mankind, it seems to me that it is a great injustice on the part of parents, who are such according to nature only, not to leave them in the hands of their first and principal Master. Parents have over their children only the rights which the Creator has given them, and these rights are subordinated in all things to the designs of the Most High whose vassals they are simply. But the God whom we serve is so good that He does not assert His rights, hence He is wont to vouchsafe generously in this world and in the other His rewards to those from whom He exacts great sacrifices. How many

fathers and mothers owe their eternal salvation to the tears and prayers which their children have shed and said in the Lord's bosom! How many families are visited with most plentiful blessings because some one among them has interceded incessantly for them to Christ! The Communion of Saints is a beautiful doctrine, in which some do penance and acts of virtue for others; therefore I engage that the people of the world would be worthy great pity, if they could thwart, as you attempted to do, the generous spirit which urges certain souls toward a life more perfect for themselves and more beneficial for others. I have also said that parents who place no obstacle in the way of their children's vocation receive many consolations in this forlorn world. First, they feel that their children are a hundred-fold more happy than they would be if they were attached to the world, and the enjoyment of this happiness is no inconsiderable thing. Again, if they really have faith, they will understand the dignity and extent

of the call made by God to their sons and daughters, and will value it highly. The mother of the two Apostles, James and John, asked of the Lord for them the two principal places in His kingdom, one at the right hand of His throne and the other at the left. Yet what she sought thus she in some measure obtained, and this privilege is still the portion of those who, after the example of the Apostles, have left all to follow Jesus the Saviour, for they will be in veritable honor in the Kingdom of His Father."

"You give me some relief," the Duke of Alsace replied. "How exceedingly right Odile was, and how mistaken I was in my views!"

"Let me add moreover, Lord Adalric, to all the advantages for families, of which I have spoken, that receive the blessing of giving one of their own to the service of God, another great benefit which proceeds from proximity to infinite love (which makes us love more vehemently those to whom we owe our affection than natural sentiment is

capable of), the great benefit that filial love is nowhere better developed than in those who are especially consecrated to the Lord."

"Ah! well, may God give me back Odile, and in your presence, Father, I make now a vow to give to my daughter this domain of Hohenburg in order that she may establish here a monastery. I am a man of my word, and will hold faithfully to my promise."

"I receive this promise, my son, and like to think that I shall recall it to your memory. But it is growing late, and I wish, before returning to the convent, to salute the noble Bereswinde. Will you be kind enough to bring me to her?"

Adalric conducted the Abbot towards the grove where the Duchess was. Her three youngest sons, Otto, Conrad, and Hubert, were playing around her, scarcely suspecting her sorrow,—the happy lot of childhood, which knows not how to weep except between smiles. Hugh and Frederic were also there. The monk invoked God's blessing on all, and then withdrew.

On the following day, Frederic bade farewell to Hohenburg, and a long interval ensued before he saw it again. He returned to his estates, but he was no longer the vivacious, joyful prince who came at the sound of the hunting-horn to the Alsatian castle to claim Odile's hand. His countenance, however, did not betray sadness of spirit, but rather a masculine seriousness, and if some prophet had the privilege of reading his soul, perhaps he would find there a resolution already formed, though it was still a secret, which concerned the King of heaven and the Duke of Suabia.

* * * * *

For a whole year Adalric searched for his daughter in the vicinity of his home and the outlying districts. He had promised in vain magnificent rewards to any one who could give information about Odile; he had in vain sent out scouts to explore the villages and forests; his efforts were useless, and he began to fear exceedingly that he would nevermore see the princess in this world.

Bereswinde prayed ardently to the Blessed Virgin to give her back her child, and could not believe that she would not be heard, but, at times, she became also discouraged in her long expectancy. She found some comfort in caressing her little Hubert, whose open smiling countenance resembled strikingly Odile's.

One day a peasant-woman came to the castle and asked to speak to the Duchess; it was the faithful Berthilda, who, ascertaining from the reports spread about the country that the child of her adoption had disappeared, desired to have some intelligence about the event and had made afoot the long journey which separated her from Hohenburg.

"Alas!" said Bereswinde weeping, "God alone knows if my daughter yet lives, and to what place she has retired. For His love she left all, and He it is who watches over her." Berthilda shared the noble lady's grief; she could be comforted no longer for Odile's absence, and being a girl of good

judgment and decorum, she gave advice that was listened to with readiness: "Madame, when Odile knows that you are trying to find her place of concealment and has heard your project spoken of, she will take precautionary measures not to come back, because she values her vow at a greater price than her life. Do you not think that it would be the best policy to have it proclaimed by heralds on all sides that the Duke of Alsace promises his daughter, if she will return to her home, not to oppose her wishes on the subject of her vow made to the Most High, and to give her some suitable place for a monastery? Poor little thing that I am, I do not hesitate to say that, by this means your search will be successful."

Adalric recognized the justice of this advice and approved of it; it was announced with great ado on both sides of the Rhine that the Princess Odile need not fear to return to Hohenburg, as the Duke had given his word as a knight not to molest her.

CHAPTER VI.

ODILE BECOMES ABBESS OF HOHENBURG.

WHILE heaven and earth were thus being moved to find Odile, where was she? She was living in the poverty of Christ, but in peace of mind, in the suburbs of Freiburg under the guise of a beggar. In this place, many came willingly to her assistance, for she had kept even in her rags the gift of attracting all hearts to her. Several times inquisitive persons attempted to discover her origin, for she was as beautiful as a queen and as modest as a saint, but nobody was subtle enough to draw her secret from her.

"Pray, my dear," repeated often the daughter of a woodman who was so kind as to share with the princess her frugal meal, "pray, tell me at least from what country you came?"

"Heaven is my real country," replied the unknown girl, smiling, "and I am journeying

towards it; I am so overwhelmed with affliction, I indeed see that I am not in my country in this wretched world." A deep sorrow pervaded these words.

"But do you know," said the young inquirer, "that you have the appearance of a fine lady, and certainly did not come from a cottage?"

"Yes, I was reared under the roof of a cottage," Odile replied, very much affected, as she recollected with happiness and gratitude her first years which were passed in the good Berthilda's home, the humble shelter which she had graced with her infantile smiles, where she had shed her first tears and offered to God the first-fruits of her life. One beautiful day, Adalric's heralds arrived at Freiburg. The whole province was in a state of commotion; in the cabins and in the castles, the talk turned on the subject of this runaway Princess Odile, of high and powerful family, who, by her flight, had left her fate a mystery to be unraveled.

People of all classes and castes of human-

ity, noble, middle and plebeian, have been inquisitive and curious in all ages. It is not to day that they have begun to chatter and gossip, or have been ready to make an ox out of an egg by dint of increasing the latter. A sensation is especially food for conversation. Everybody at Freiburg told everybody else the marvelous story of Odile's disappearance; some even went so far as to say that she had ascended, like Enoch and Elias, on a fiery chariot, and was dwelling with them in a region whither nobody could go and find her. But the best manoeuvre in all this battle of tongues was the one made by Rose, the woodman's daughter, who, as we have seen, gave nearly every day half of her brown bread to the pretty pauper. She did not go about gabbling with her neighbors, nor bring her ingenuity to bear on the account of Odile's flight which had been already highly elaborated by seething brains; but, a less vulgar inquirer, she left her house and proceeded slowly to the neighboring church, where she knew that her beggar-friend passed many hours at her devotions.

Rose carried her plan in her head unknown to anybody, but she was much bothered as to how she could put adroitly and successfully the questions which she had determined to ask. But, however, bothered she was, it was first of all necessary for her to exercise her patience, for Odile's prayers were not finished, and so great was the respect which she inspired in all that nobody would presume to interrupt her. At least Rose could look at her at her ease, and the young lady's countenance appeared to her as luminous as a seraph's, when she raised her eyes toward the tabernacle and adored her God. When her devotions were at an end, the mendicant arose and left the sacred place; the young observer followed her softly and joined her on the porch.

"By St. Michael! my dear, I thought that we were going to bed in there," she exclaimed, laughing as if her heart would break. "Do you know that I have been praying for three hours waiting for you?"

"I do not doubt it, Rose, because I did

not hear you enter ; but have you something very urgent to tell me ? ”

“ Well, yes ! For the past two days there has been quite an uproar in Freiburg, to which city the Duke of Alsace has sent men-at-arms who are bearers of important intelligence.” When Rose said these words, she looked searchingly at Odile, who became slightly pale, and placed her hand on her breast, but she recovered so quickly from her emotion that nobody would have hardly noticed it, and she replied in a tone of voice already calm, “ What then is the matter ? ”

“ What ! You are the only person in the country who is ignorant of it. Do you not know that the Duke of Alsace, much afflicted at the loss of his daughter, who, report says, fled from his domain, has caused it to be proclaimed in all places that he swears to leave her at liberty not to marry if it seem good to her, and also to bestow on her his castle of Hohenburg for a monastery.”

“ Hohenburg ! — A monastery ! ” Odile could say no more. You can fancy her as-

tonishment, joy, and above all the feeling of gratitude that welled up in her heart to God.

"I guessed it well," exclaimed Rose, jumping with gratification and clapping her hands. "I am all at once much eased and pained, for now that I know you are the daughter of a prince, I shall scarcely dare look at you hereafter, still less embrace you as I did hitherto."

"What do you say?" Odile answered taking her gently by the hand; "I shall always love you, my dear Rose, and never forget the sweet pity which you testified towards me in my misery by relieving me with the best you had. Since the Lord Adalric, my father, makes an offer of peace to me in the name of the King of heaven and the gift of an abbey, will you bless God with me and come to live in my monastery?"

"I shall follow you wherever you go. My parents have a heavy burden in their many children, and they will be delighted to see me serving the Saviour Jesus and our Blessed Lady in your company. But are you then resolved to return to Hohenburg?"

“I know my father, and know that he is loyal to his word; if he has promised me liberty to consecrate my life to the Lord, he will not contravene his promise. My beloved mother, Bereswinde, longs, without doubt, for her daughter's return, and the time has come when I ought to go back to her. For a long year, day and night, I have besought Christ with tears to assist me in my poverty and weakness, having no one to defend nor help me. He that puts his hope in God and not in man abides under the all-powerful protection of the Master of the universe; he does not hope in vain.”

Rose's tongue was speedily unloosed in the neighborhood, and in less than an hour, Adalric's messengers knew of the happy result of their mission to Freiburg. The Pearl of Alsace, who was sought for everywhere, was at length found. This would be the making of the heralds' fortunes, for their prince valued very highly this pearl, and would reward them magnificently for finding it. They were all to a man delighted also,

because they loved their young princess, and all the vassals adored her.

Among the envoys sent to Freiburg was the old servant, who in former days had been appointed by Hugh to bring Odile from Jaume; hence, counting a second time on his lucky star, he had a presentiment of being successful in his new journey with the help of God and His holy angels. He was so overwhelmed with joy that he wanted to leave that same evening, but Odile begged for another day to bid farewell to the good people in the vicinity; and thanks to the pecuniary resources with which the Alsatian heralds had been furnished, she was enabled to acknowledge by favors the assistance which she received in exile.

* * * * *

Hohenburg was in holiday attire, just as when Prince Frederic came to see Odile. A cortege entered the court of honor, but it was not the German Duke with his retinue, it was the Saint of Alsace, who came once more to the home of her fathers. If ever mortals

were happy, certainly it was the people of the castle at this moment when past trials and sufferings were forgotten. Adalric, however, always retained his regret; he could not be comforted for having caused his daughter so much tribulation, save by the thought of the happiness which he would prepare later for her. Bereswinde, given up wholly to joy, could have almost chanted her *Nunc dimittis*, if Odile had not remarked sensibly that they should now enjoy at length the happiness which God had vouchsafed them, and at a suitable time offer their thanksgiving to Him. Hugh never wearied of looking at the pallid, but ever sympathetic face of his young sister, on which sorrow had left the imprint of a newly reflected sanctity. Otto, Conrad and little Hubert hung on the gown of their big sister and begged for a large share of her caresses; everybody felt in the atmosphere that God's blessing had descended on this home.

The Duke of Alsace held to his promise. He brought workingmen and architects in a

short time to Hohenburg, and the ancient lordly castle was gradually transformed into a splendid monastery. The family quitted the mountain, and built its towers and fortress on the plain below, leaving the heights to the daughters of the cloister, who were thus much nearer heaven. Odile supervised carefully the progress of the labors, for she was desirous to be settled in the abbey. It seemed as if the spirits of heaven engaged in the work, for it proceeded very quickly, and that what the Saint so ardently hoped for, God accomplished promptly, as it were, by a miracle. As soon as the new convent was habitable, Odile was installed as Abbess, leaving certain portions of the structure to be completed in succeeding years. Numerous fervent souls flocked around her, eager to imbibe on the heights of Hohenburg the nourishment of all the virtues, and to become flowers in that virginal garden which an Abbess of later days described mystically under the name of *Hortus deliciarum*: "The garden of delights."

Adalric's daughter renewed in her monastery all the pious exercises which she had seen in their vigor at Jaume, and the new abbey was surpassed by none of the other abbeys in piety, regularity and perfection; thus it became like the noble German abbeys, a religious centre which fertilized Alsace and made its faith productive and everlasting.

After Adalric and Bereswende had erected a splendid home for their family on the borders of the Rhine, they settled Hugo their eldest son as master of it, and he now became Duke of Alsace by the abdication of his father. Long and happily he reigned over his people, and following the counsel of Odile whom he frequently consulted, and aided by her prayers, he established an ideal kingdom in which religion and justice held full sway. Duke Hugo appreciated early the benefit of religion in the promotion of the welfare of his people, and was a loyal subject of Mother Church, who did so much by her legislation to raise nations from the slough of barbarism to the dignity of Christ-

ian civilization. We must not forget that these primitive days were times of violence and commotion. The cruelty of the ancient Roman civilization was a germ that had fermented for ages in the soil of society, and its remains were apparent in later periods. The spirit of Christian charity lived in men's heads, but the olden cruelty and barbarian ferocity still ruled their hearts, and religion was the only means to extirpate this pestilence of all true progress. The Catholic Church had a terrible struggle with the elements that resisted her efforts to do away with open violence and private feuds. We know that in the very land where St. Odile passed her days, men always went around armed and even entered the churches with their arms; such a custom could not help but produce evils that were wide-spread. The house of God was often converted into an arena of blood and vengeance. In France, in the very century of Odile's existence, the Council of Chalons-sur-Saone in its 17th canon pronounced excommunica-

tion against all laymen who excited tumults or drew their swords to strike any one in the churches or in their precincts. Thus, we also see the prudence and foresight which dictated the 29th canon of the third Council of Orleans, celebrated in 538, which forbade any one to be present at Mass or Vespers armed. It took many centuries for the Church to prevail; acts of violence were still continued, and though religion proclaimed again and again the divinely given precept of fraternal charity, it always met with resistance in the harsh character and fierce passions of the descendants of the barbarians. The coercive arm of the Church labored to promote brotherly love by means of spiritual penalties. More than four centuries elapsed since the Council of Arles was celebrated in the middle of the Vth century, and as we see from the canons of the Council of Worms, held in 868, the same bitterness and feuds yet obtained. Rulers were mostly to blame for this un-Christian animosity, but the Church did not bend before them, any

more than she bent before Pagan emperors. She excommunicated kings as quickly as she did nobles and serfs, and she taught petty tyrants that they must be submissive to the laws of God and her salutary injunctions. In this way bending these lawless princes to the yoke of justice and morality, the Church improved the manners of society and gave a healthy tone to human progress. She thus planted the seed of true Christian civilization ; and when we remember that the petty lords of those harsh times were the origin of the principal families which now occupy the principal thrones of the world, we easily comprehend the invaluable service which religion rendered to the improvement and progress of the human race. Justice triumphed over brute force. Duke Hugh was one of the few rulers of his day who coöperated with the Church in ameliorating the customs and manners of his vassals. He supported the efforts of religion to exclude from society force as a motive-power of human action, and to inspire in its stead the

peaceful spirit of benevolence. He was himself the embodiment of charity, a true disciple of Christ; *pertransiit benefaciendo*: "He went about doing good." His name is enshrined in the history of his country and is often coupled with the name and memory of his sainted sister, who labored with him for temporal and eternal good.

"Sorrow with sorrow sighing, hope with hope
Exalting, heart embracing heart entire."

As for Adalric and Bereswinde, they returned to Hohenburg to finish their days in peace, bidding good-bye to the proud world and resolved to labor with their daughter in works of mercy, which, with prayer and study, occupied the days of the Lady-Abbess and her pensive nuns. The love which the converted prince now bore towards Odile impelled him to practice her virtues and methods of life. How true it is, as Tennyson writes:

"Love reflects the thing beloved."

Rose, the foreign flower, transplanted to the "blue Alsatian mountains," took deep

root on them and devoted her life to God in this peaceful monastic home where she learned the truth of the old saying: "Be happy, but be so by piety." Berthilda also could not be contented until she lived near the child of her adoption; and she who often, like a second mother, smiled on this slumbering child, and with almost a mother's strong yearning besought God's love and mercy for Odile, now wished, when she found old age coming on apace, to close her life under the protecting kindness of *her dear princess*, as she always called Odile.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ANCIENT MONASTIC LIFE—A CLOSING EPISODE.

THE veil of obscurity has fallen on the monastic homes of ancient days, but History has retained sufficient data to give us an insight into the lives of sacrifice passed by holy virgins in the claustral state beneath the shadow of the rood. The religious enthusiasm that peopled the large abbeys and monasteries of the Middle Ages may have in some measure disappeared amidst the ever-engrossing activities and onward dispositions of our modern days, but a few glimmering rays escape now and then from the night of ages to disclose to our wondering gaze the divine faith and charity that made the monastic homes of old golden with the benefits and blessings of a complacent Providence. We have seen how completely entranced St. Odile was by this

monastic life, and how she jeopardized fortune and all that could be dearest in this world to be free to live under its severe and solitary rule and thus weave out her eternal destiny. To her it was a spiritual garden, into which she entered voluntarily and in which she wished to breathe the fragrant odors of humility, chastity and entire submission to God's will. Her soul was like the chastest lily there, for "the flower of sweetest smell is shy and lowly." It were beneficial for us to uplift our worldly hearts, to look awhile on the much-misrepresented monastic life of early Christian times. We confine our consideration to the religious life spent by holy virgins in the mediæval abbeys and monasteries that were to be found in every civilized country, but especially in France, Germany, Ireland and Britain.

Often these nuns were the daughters of kings and noblemen, and the strength of soul which inspired them to leave all for Christ's sake was beautifully tempered by a rare simplicity of character and a winning gentleness

of manner, unknown to those that dwelt in royal halls or mixed in the frivolities and pleasures of the world. The royal nun was indeed the royal sovereign, the veritable queen who patterned her existence and manners after that model of imperial grace—our Blessed Lady, the Queen of heaven. Nobody but a Catholic can understand how maidens, brought up in all the refinement and luxury of palatial homes, will abandon wealth, distinction and earthly bliss to cast themselves into what the eloquent Bossuet has called “that voluntary prison into which they threw themselves for the love of God.”

Alsace, where St. Odile lived, has been always considered German in origin and settlement, and what was predicated by Tacitus in ancient days of the German women, viz.: that they were austere chaste and held in high honor by their husbands, might be as justly applied to the fair women of remote Alsace.

It is saying much in praise of the German women that in their rude country they were

not, as in so many Pagan lands, mere chattels, the sport and playthings of unfeeling lords; they were, on the contrary, living, not dead beings, who acted mainly for themselves and were protected against license by the severest penalties. They, therefore, played a prominent part in the development of national life.

When Christianity elevated them to the dignity of true womanhood, took them from the Egyptian bondage of paganism and depravity and made their very weakness their strength, they hastened in myriads to God's altars and laid upon them their hearts and virginity as their most precious offerings to the Saviour who had redeemed and brought them to the eternal light of day. They lavished their fondest affections on religion, and voluntarily embraced restraint, sacrifice, penury and obscurity to become the chosen brides of the crucified God.* When a goodly number of these saintly virgins were gathered in a religious house, one of them was elected

* Anglo-Saxon legislation bestowed on a nun the title of "Godes bryde."

by the body as abbess, or appointed by the Bishop to that important office, and the secular authorities accorded such a dignitary all of the privileges, liberties and attributes usually given to men of high rank. Frequently, these abbesses were of royal stock, and they accordingly kept a princely retinue and state. Their influence often surpassed the action of bishops and kings; they attended all great religious and national assemblies, and had a voice in matters of the highest consideration and importance. In some countries, like England and Scotland, they were placed on the same level with kings, and their signatures appear, in the midst of those of the bishops and nobles, affixed to decrees of national import. Great, indeed, must have been the reverence for religion when these spiritual rulers were thus honored and appreciated. We refer to these authentic points in history to show to what power and high standing the headships of abbeys and monasteries had arisen in the old mediæval days of faith. The Church seems to have

recognized the superior rank of the abbesses, if we judge from the lengthy, solemn ceremony which was observed at their installation. It certainly was most impressive, second alone to the rite by which kings were anointed. The life of these nuns of the olden times can hardly be appreciated, or, in fact, understood by the unspiritual, materialistic world of to-day. Hence it is that we read in the writings of rationalistically inclined or openly malignant and prejudiced men the aversion which they have for the nunneries and monasteries of the Middle Ages, as well as for all the institutions of those "Dark" centuries. It is a sad reflection on the religious spirit of our days, albeit a gross display of impertinence, to hear *intellectual* speakers and writers expressing their indignation at the Church for permitting maidens to bury themselves in the living death of these monastic establishments, where they chose, to use the poet's words:

"For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold, fruitless moon."

This may sound perfectly agreeable to bigots and men of "modern culture," advanced scientists and carping agnostics, but it will hardly bear the test of truth, and is always found wanting in the balance of justice. There is scarcely a fair-minded reader of those abused and maltreated times who, when he views the immense services which the *religieuses* of the Middle Ages gave to society and the needy classes of humanity, will not be struck with admiration for them, and will not wish to place them on the bead-roll of heroes that have uplifted our degraded human nature. Their lives were ever devoted to the amelioration of mankind. Some lived in solitude, away from the "madding crowd's ignoble strife," having sought an asylum in God's immensity, where they prayed for the needs of society; others lived, as it were, amidst the whirl of life, and assisted the poor, tended the sick, cared for orphans, educated the rich and lowly alike, and nursed the wounded, as we to-day have witnessed their successors, the sacrificing Sisters, in the wars of our period.

They were not, as ignorant writers have declared, the victims of social, family or ecclesiastical violence ; they were, for the main part, free agents in their choice of the claustral state, who abandoned, of their own will, home, parents, relatives, and the world with its blandishments and riches, and fled to the standard of the cross. God gave them strength of soul to select poverty and obedience, preferably to wealth and freedom which endanger man's salvation ; and many of them, as we have said, the children of noble and even royal blood, sought in the monastic life spiritual comforts not obtainable in the world, and an eternal crown of glory in the future world.

We look with amazement at the varied accomplishments of these consecrated virgins, and perceive them with pleasure as the solitary lights which gleam out of the prevailing darkness. United to extensive learning was that contentment of heart that surpasses all understanding. The convent was a foretaste of celestial bliss,

“Where peaceful rule, and duty free,
Walk hand in hand in charity;
Where oft devotion’s tranced glow
Can such a glimpse of heaven bestow,
That the enraptured sisters see
High vision and deep mystery.”

Such was the wisdom, charity, prudence, in fact the Christ-like character of one of these nuns of the mediæval times that a writer, wrapt in admiration, thus testifies: “She lived in the memories of men as a patron against calumny, a nurse of piety against sorrow, a light of the holy Church, an oil of mercy; to the frigid a fire of charity, and to the dead in corporal and spiritual miseries, a refreshing and reviving joy.”

As nuns are predestined, just like priests, for the greatest glory of God, so, like the latter, they are “a chosen generation” set apart “to declare His virtues who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Their lives were lives of activity, and time did not hang heavily on their hands. With the motto which ruled them, the motto of the great St. Benedict, whose rule was generally

followed, "Labor and pray," they made work for themselves where seemingly none was made for them. Some attended to physical labor, and hesitated not to use their hands even in agricultural pursuits; others waited on the sick, the pilgrims and travelers who were drawn to the monasteries by the fame of their charity. Adjoining most of the mediæval abbeys were hospices where the saintly nuns performed daily works of mercy for Christ, whose face they saw in the suffering poor that besought their charity. No self-sacrifice was like that of these generous nuns; corporal and spiritual deeds of mercy were, so to speak, their food, their refreshment and their ever-growing strength. It is no wonder that a traveler of our own days should have exclaimed in a burst of admiration, as he witnessed similar scenes of heroic love: "I could almost say that my idea of heaven was a place filled with Sisters of Charity." Unlike Elias on Horeb, when he mourned without moving, and the Lord said to him: *Quid hic agis, Elia?* "What dost

thou here, Elias?" they regarded time as God's most precious gift after grace, and were ever employed in their Father's business. Their lives were both active and contemplative.

Besides the manual labor which they performed, they also devoted many hours of the day to mental pursuits. Some of the mediæval nuns were most learned and accomplished in sacred and secular science. Contemporary historians and chroniclers bear ample testimony to their extraordinary intellectual abilities and acquirements. The erudite Mabillon ascribes to St. Boniface what he calls "the singular ornament of his order," viz. the learning of the nuns who followed the Benedictine rule. This was the rule which St. Odile adopted for her abbey at Hohenburg. The nuns of the German monasteries, like their sisters in Britain, were profound students of Sacred Scripture. Of them it was said that "excepting while at prayer, the divine pages never left their hands." In those mediæval days, sacred

learning was the acme of all knowledge ; but while the nuns of Germany and Britain were deeply versed in it, they were also well grounded in the ancient classics, grammar, logic, history, and in fact in all the liberal arts. It was necessary that the scope of their intellectual attainments should be more than usual, in fact, quite extensive. Like their associates in religion, the monks, the nuns transcribed books, centuries before the art of printing was discovered, and some of them were composers of works that have come down to our days. We read of one convent in Belgium which became celebrated for its work in reading and writing and in painting also ; another in Germany was noted not only for its embroidery and weaving, but also for its excellence in having written the four Gospels, the whole Psalter, and many other books of the divine Scriptures, which they ornamented with liquid gold, gems and pearls. These are but a few instances of many convents, which were devoted to intellectual pursuits. The cloistered

nuns employed all their time, as an old chronicler bears witness, "between psalmody and fasting, vigils and reading," in transcribing books and important documents. They thus united learning with sanctity, labor with prayer.

One of the great gifts of the Holy Ghost is the gift of science, and to this especial indwelling of the Third Person of the most Blessed Trinity we must ascribe that mystical knowledge so largely possessed by the nuns of the Middle Ages, which amazes us to-day, spite of our boasted attainments. In no other way can we account for the profound intimacy which they evidenced in the grasp of subjects worthy the genius of the brightest church-fathers. We know that faith is a special additional light which is infused by God into man's reason, and which is given to every mind that has been regenerated by water and the Holy Spirit; but the gift of science is something super-added to both reason and faith by the illuminative action of the Holy Ghost and awarded to those who

have preserved in their souls the priceless grace of God. In the obscurity of the cloister, far from the trials of the world and the pressing temptations of this lower life, these saintly maidens kept themselves undefiled and free from sin. It was their continual endeavor to abide in God that He might abide in them. Thus they united the perfection of reason with the sanctification of the illuminating Spirit, and were conditioned therefore to explore and understand more thoroughly than ordinary mortals the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. They found in the broad landscape of God's truth beautiful scenes on which to feed their intellect, and in God's law a sweet persuasion that captivated both mind and heart. With the Psalmist they might have said: *Dominus illuminatio mea*: "The Lord is my light."

The eminent purity of soul which these holy virgins cultivated, as accordant with their vow, gave them an adaptability to see and know truth, for it is absolutely necessary that the understanding should be free from all

bias towards uncleanness to grasp and appreciate the knowledge which cometh from God. Anything that is morally wrong makes the eye of the soul squint, and it cannot therefore perceive the directness of God's truth nor the grandeur of His holy law. This seems to be St. Paul's sentiment: "All things are clean to the clean, but to them that are defiled, and to unbelievers, nothing is clean; but both their mind and conscience are defiled." *

Gifted with this heaven-born science, these devoted brides of Christ discoursed and wrote on some of the most elevated subjects of theology; so profound were their views on the mystical division of this Queen of all the sciences, and so sensible and correct their exposition of the doctrinal and moral sides of the same science, that, in our edification and wonder, we recall to mind, when contrasting the arrant nonsense written by some distinguished exponents of "modern religion" and "modern culture" with the pure,

*(Titus i. 13.)

limpid stream of truth which flowed from the divinely illuminated intellects of these erudite virgins, the words of our Blessed Saviour: "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father: for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight.*

To corroborate the powerful effect which the gift of science breathes into the purified and grace-laden intellect of man, we need only look at the marvellous works of the Doctors,—Augustine, Gregory, Jerome, Ambrose, Hilary, Bernard, Alphonsus and Thomas—who all wrote under the inspiration of this sacred gift of the Holy Spirit and composed their wonderful treatises at the foot of the crucifix. *Non aliam (mercedem) nisi Te, Domine.*

We must remember, if at times we recognize some trace of discontent or regret in the satisfaction of the monastic obligations, that all this was attributable to the conditions of

* (St. Luke x. 21.)

national life in their reflection on the religious life. The spiritual life did not attain to its development till after years of experience. The spirit of the cloister was always present, but in the early times in a modified form, and its merit was not forthcoming until the human mind and will were trained to understand and accept its sacrifices and burdens. Christian education and discipline were needed before the monastic life would arrive at that desirable state which foretold great progress in the way of perfection. In monastic life, as in civil life, there must be an evolution, a gradual amelioration of first principles; and we cannot help admiring the heroicity of soul and strength of purpose which conducted the virgins of St. Odile's days from the crudely civilized world to the foot of God's altar. Who were these saintly maidens? They had descended from a race still fresh in their acceptance of Christianity, and were yet possessed of many attributes and qualities which belonged to vanquished paganism. It is scarcely reasonable to sup-

pose even that pagans, brought to the profession of Christianity, could all at once acquire that pacific disposition and meekness of heart, obtainable only by centuries of Christian practice. We know of one national exception, and that is the Irish people who bowed instantly at St. Patrick's preaching to the faith of the triune God, symbolized in their native shamrock, and accepted not only the precepts, but also the counsels of God's holy law. The character of these German converts to Christianity was turbulent, and they were still, even after the grace of regeneration, desirous to maintain their native strength and too often unrestrained freedom. In the undisciplined state of the cloister in those early Christian times, the *vis vivida* of national life had its influence on the monastic life, and if betimes we hear of some disappointment or distress of soul, yet we are astonished that the nuns of those early days accepted so nobly their lives of sacrifice and persevered so earnestly in their chosen profession. But the test of life is death. And the death of

the mediæval nun was "precious in the sight of the Lord." Hers was a peaceful end, and to her, when the Lord's finger touched her, we might apply Venerable Bede's short, but expressive sentence on St. Hilda's death: *Læta mortem vidit*: "She saw death with joy." Many of the nuns foretold the time of their death, and the old chroniclers declare that they departed hence, while heavenly music was heard, to enjoy the glories of Paradise. Wonderful indeed was their love! marvelous their chasteness of soul! The world knows nought of their happiness. Men essay in vain to comprehend it. It is a mystery. Young, innocent hearts espouse themselves to God, to an invisible crucified Lord, and their faith, obedience, poverty and purity "gild their passage to eternal rest," where they cast their crowns before the throne of God. Such is the hope, the sole ambition of the sanctified nun of the Middle Ages, and truly she may say with St. Paul, when life's struggle is over: "Now we see through a glass darkly; in a moment we shall see face to face."



One beautiful summer-day, a large sized man clad in the monastic habit . . . climbed slowly and heavily the winding mountain-path.

One beautiful summer day, a large sized man clad in the monastic habit, of lofty, majestic brow and with eyes gravely down-cast, as if to veil from indiscreet gaze the thoughts that coursed through his mind, climbed slowly and heavily the winding mountain-path. His hands were lost in the large folds of his woolen garment, and he appeared to be plunged in deep meditation. One would judge from his recollected manner that he was communing with God. From time to time, however, he would emerge from the reflections which absorbed his attention so completely, and cast a glance at the natural scenery so wondrously rich about him. A pleasant smile then broke on his lips, and he murmured in a low, but musical voice: "How good it is to be here!"

When he arrived at the mountain-top, at a spot which appeared to be delightfully marked out for a resting-place, at the crossing of several narrow roads, which were bordered by soft, inviting under-brush and

from which the sight was lost in the distance and the traveler was likely to go astray, he paused and said: "Yes, it is there." As he leaned on his palmer's staff in pensive mood, one would say that he was peering down the vista of the past.

"Yes," he soliloquized, "it was there that I first saw Odile; at that time she seemed to me so good and lovely, as we rode together in the chase wherein I was the most dashing huntsman of all. She possessed the simplicity of a child and the candor of a saint, and truly her presence ravished my heart. But how far nobler and grander does she appear to me to-day, behind those convent-walls which shelter her from the world and those bolted doors which keep faithfully for God the secrets witnessed by Him alone. Be Thou ever blessed and praised, O merciful God, for having prepared this solitary nest for the dove that sought repose only in Thee; be Thou ever blessed for having, by the same stroke of grace, broken the bonds which attached me so intimately to this

world, and for having shown me the vanity of all that passes away."

After this prayer, he accomplished with quick step the short distance which separated him from the abbey, and without stopping, despite the fatigue which he felt, he entered at once the convent-church. The nuns in large numbers filled the choir-stalls with angelic modesty and hymned forth God's praises.

Duke Frederic (for it was he) perceived Odile seated in the abbatical place of honor. This visit was far different from the one which he made when he came to Hohenburg to find his *fiancée*. Hohenburg—the impregnable castle—endured now only the peaceable assaults of the wretched and needy. Everything was changed in the place, destined henceforth to prayer and silence, and on this occasion Frederic came to see a Saint.

When the divine office was finished, he was introduced at his own request to the abbess. These two souls recognized each

other quickly, for ties, purer than those with which others had endeavored to burden them, now united them forever. Frederic and Odile had prayed for each other many years, and the sacrifice of the Alsatian Prince's daughter had begotten that of the German Duke. Thus the flame of divine love sprang up from the heart which it had made a victim and arose aloft to heaven, bearing with it to God's throne the spoils of its earthly conquest.

What did the monk and abbess have to say to each other in the brief interview that for a moment had brought them together? What the elect of heaven say in the never-ending ages—the canticle of their deliverance and peace.

“Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken, and we are delivered.” *

And now Frederic, unwilling to take anything for refreshment save a little wine to recuperate his strength, left Hohenburg, never

*(Ps. CXXIII, 7.)

to see it again, bearing with him to the heart of Germany the sweet memory of that great Princess who covered Alsace with her deeds of charity and protected it by her prayers.

CONCLUSION.

The story which we have told you, dear readers, is no fairy-tale. It is a legend, that is to say a narrative in which popular imagination has found its place, but the basis of which preserves historical reality.

It is a historical fact that Adalric, Duke of Alsace in the VIIth century, had by his wife Bereswinde a daughter Odile, who was born blind and incurred on that account her father's anger, and that this predestined child recovered miraculously her sight at her baptism, which was administered to her when she was twelve years of age, in the Monastery of Jaume of which her aunt was the abbess.

It is also historical that Hugh, the young exile's brother, caused her to return secretly to her father's castle, and that when the first

stage of discontent passed away, Adalric bestowed on her his paternal affection.

When the German Duke sued for the hand of the saintly Princess, Odile, who had vowed herself to God, fled from her home disguised as a beggar, crossed the Rhine and concealed her identity in the suburbs of Freiburg. There she learned at the end of a certain time that her father (who had searched for her in vain) had caused to be published everywhere that she might return without fear to Hohenburg and feel secure in enjoying the liberty of embracing whatever kind of life suited her. Relying on this promise she returned to the castle, and Adalric, wishing to accomplish fully that for which he had given his word, not only allowed his daughter found a religious community, but also bestowed on her his own dwelling for that purpose.

Odile soon found herself at the head of three hundred nuns, and as their number began to increase, she was compelled to build a second convent at Nieder-Munster. Adal-

ric and Bereswinde decided to pass their last years with the pious abbess and bequeathed to her at their death a portion of their wealth, to be devoted to whatever good works she had in view. At Nieder-Munster, Odile built a hospital and loved to care herself for the aged and the sick. She rendered at last her beautiful soul to God December 13th, 720, surrounded by her daughters, who, while deploring the most devoted of mothers, celebrated with the angels the triumphant entrance of the Saint into heaven.

The abbey of Hohenburg was in the course of time enriched with magnificent gifts; those who were able came to it with pleasure and left some of their fortune in the hands of these daughters of solitude and charity, who used the revenue of their convent in assisting the poor and suffering in the vicinity. The community flourished to such a degree that later on its history the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa conferred on its abbess the title of Princess of the Holy Roman Empire. Down to the XIIth century this monastery

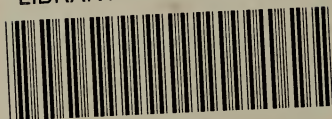
continued to follow the rule of its Foundress ; it adopted afterwards the rule of St. Benedict.

Hohenburg has changed its name for the more illustrious one of Mt. St. Odile. For centuries, tourists and pilgrims climb this holy mountain in Alsace and refresh their souls for some moments on its superb heights. If, as Father Lacordaire has said, there are places blessed by a special predestination, may we not attribute that favor to this enchanted spot of which we have spoken? From there, the delighted eye discovers twenty cities and more than three hundred villages scattered along the plain of the Rhine and living in the abundance of fruitful and splendid nature. On the mountain, the ruins of Roman walls summon up the memory of ancient paganism ; but scarcely have we perceived these reliques of a remote past, when the eye is quickly turned from them by the lordly aspect of the abbey,—the memorial of Christ's triumph through Odile. A pure, crystal stream invites the passer-by to bathe his eyes in its waters, in remembrance

of the daughter of Adalric, who recovered her sight by a stroke of grace. In the monastery, the *religieuses* still extend hospitality to visitors; it is necessary that on this mountain top all things should have the stamp of pious tradition.

From the summit of Hohenburg, the Virgin of Alsace watched always over her native land; she lived there as an angel spreading her wings over it to preserve its faith. The pilgrim who kneels in the Saint's church knows that he always brings away from it a provision of happiness and peace. The *Good Princess*, just as in former days, has something to vouchsafe the poor people always, and does so without reckoning the cost.

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